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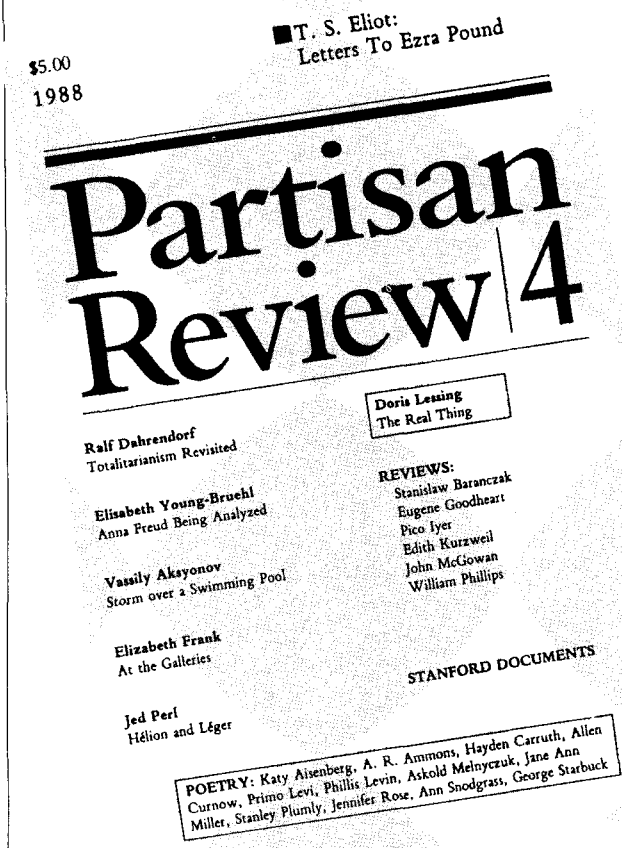

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Natan Sharansky

FREE

I wrote my memoir, *Fear No Evil*, partially because the world really shouldn't be naive. The free world should understand how different their world is from the one where slavery is not only deep in the system but also deep in the minds of the people, where a person is in fact the property of the state, and where the state decides what a person should be permitted to do today and tomorrow. We must not deceive ourselves. Although there is a new Soviet leader, a new type of leader, there is definitely no change in human rights. And we must not deceive ourselves into thinking that this leader is making exciting reforms, which he really isn't, or that he is changing the basic principle of the system, the principle that people should get instructions from the state. *Glasnost*, after all, is a new system of instructions, and the best proof of this is that many of the people about whom I wrote are still in prison under the same conditions which I described. The crime of the majority of them is that they were saying some years ago what Gorbachev is saying today. I think that it is impossible to understand the system unless you know how developed it is, how it does everything possible to destroy the individual. But there was another personal reason for me to write this story. When I left the prison I felt a big burden, something inside of me that wouldn't let me be free. I felt that I had to share this experience with others.

Coming back to the difference between the systems, you must always remember that when we use the words *trial*, *prison*, *court*, *lawyer*, *state*, *individual*, *law*, you have to apply them to different systems, Eastern and Western. The words are the same; the meaning is absolutely different. And what was, after all, this so-called investigation of me? The Soviet authorities accused me of being a spy, but President Carter said that I was not. Of course it was important that President Carter said it and that people in the West who had doubts knew that I wasn't a spy, but the Soviet people were not told this. Andropov, who was the head of the K.G.B. and signed the first paper of my case, the first of 15,000 pages of my case, knew very

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Editor's Note: "Free" was first presented as a talk given at the Ninety-Second Street Y in New York City on June 12, 1988.

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well that I was not a spy. But for the government, the very fact that I was a spokesman for Jewish emigration, the movement of human rights, was high treason. The officials had no doubts. Hence I was a criminal. In Stalin's time they simply could have killed me. But it is interesting to see that today the system works differently; they do not kill you, they go into long, long investigations. Seventeen investigators, day and night, are interrogating you; they prepare 15,000 pages, fifty-two volumes. For what? Simply to show themselves what a legitimate state it is.

How insecure they must be to have to protect themselves with all these pages which in advance one knows are a lie. And they do not publish them. They put a seal on each of these volumes, "Top Secret," so nobody outside their own offices will see them. And after that they sentence you to a long term, put you into prison, into a camp, into a punishment cell, isolating you from all the world so no one will hear you. What more do they need? Every day they will be trying to seduce you, to make you say that they are right and that you are not. And for this they develop sophisticated systems. They have eighteen levels of feeding you: each time you will be getting less and less food in order to turn you into a kind of laboratory rat so that your stomach will make you say "Yes, I agree, let me sign what you ask me to sign." Why do they need this?

At the time, you understand that to some extent they are absolutely right in what they're trying to do, because, after all, in such a system, stability depends fully on the fact that people accept their power. That the majority of people will be the majority of slaves, who feel self-respect only through belonging to that state and not from understanding that they have some rights of their own. That with such a system, missiles, camps, and the *Gulag* are of course very important for stability, but much more important is the mentality of the people. And they are right to be afraid of the individual. Because I believe, and all my experience indicates—though it contradicts all those compliments which I constantly hear about unusual courage and outstanding fighters—that each of us who knows what he is struggling for, who has some firm moral principles, some framework in which he exists and on which he stands, has enough resources inside himself—or traditional religious resources which he can get from God, whichever you prefer—to mobilize and to enable him to resist.

I think the first and most important step in resisting is that you

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must feel yourself really a free man. I was not a free man during the first twenty years of my life. I was, like many others, an absolutely assimilated Soviet Jew. Like all my generation, I didn't know anything about my Jewishness. I didn't know the simplest words, like Hanukkah, Shabbat, Yom Kippur. And I tried to exist as a loyal Soviet citizen of the system with doublethink, to say one thing and to do another. But, of course, I knew that I was a Jew because there were cards identifying yourself and your parents as Jews, which means that there is, and that you are a victim of, anti-Semitism. But the only sense you have of your Jewishness is negative. Hence the desire to become free means somehow to get rid of your Jewishness. You try to become free and you cannot. The turning point for me was 1967, when, after the Six-Day War and the new anti-Israel atmosphere which filled the Soviet official press, you suddenly saw many anti-Semites treat you with the same hatred but with much more respect. And you suddenly realized that, whether you wanted to be or not, for these people you are connected with the state of Israel and with those Jews who live in Israel or in other countries. And you can repeat a thousand times that you are Russian because your language is Russian and your literature and your culture is Russian, but for them you are a Jew. You must understand that the state of Israel is struggling at this moment not only for its right to exist, but also for your dignity. And then when you turn back on your history, your past, your culture, your language, then you suddenly feel enough strength to say the truth and to feel yourself free. And only after you feel yourself free, only after you are ready to speak openly about yourself, your friends, and your people, do you have enough courage and force and justification to speak about the rights of other people. That was my conclusion, my feeling, at the moment of my arrest.

As I said, before my arrest, for three years I was an official spokesman of our movement. What this means is that virtually every day I was meeting with the foreign press, with politicians, with numerous American tourists, including many Jews from New York who were bringing us information and books in Hebrew and trying to get information from us. As a rule, as all the activity was open, I was accompanied by K.G.B. men, by "tails" as we called them. Day and night, every eight hours the cars of the K.G.B. men replaced each other, and they accompanied me openly, listening in on my calls when I was going to meet correspondents and observing me

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giving them documents. At some point you get used to the way you are followed: they are almost part of your family. At night the engine in their car is going because they have to warm themselves—it is extremely cold in Russia, unlike in New York. While you hear it you sleep well. When you don't hear it you think: something is wrong, what's happening? Of course they can arrest you, but they themselves cannot beat you because their job is to take you in.

Then I was arrested, suddenly taken from my house, thrown into a car, brought to prison, stripped. They immediately reminded me that now everything had changed. Your clothes are not yours, your body does not belong to you, they can do with it whatever they want. And they show you the order indicating why you were arrested and what you are accused of, namely, Article 64, which means high treason and is much more serious than Article 70—the usual dissident charge you might expect—because it means you could be sentenced to death. And in the first interrogation they say to you that now there will be no more press conferences, now your friends from Israel and America won't help you, now your fate is fully in their hands. And it means, of course, that if you behave yourself, if you cooperate, you will be permitted to go to Israel soon, to your wife. And if not, you will be killed. At the next interrogation they remind you that in all their history there was not a single case like this. They are very cynical. They say "Let's not discuss whether you are a spy or not a spy, what's the difference? We have announced to the entire world that you are a spy. There isn't one case in Soviet history when we've retracted and not sent a man to trial. And if we send him to trial, and he does not cooperate, we sentence him to death. This is your fate, so you can choose."

They reminded me of this choice day after day after day. Suddenly, in the very first days, you're full of fear. Maybe they haven't noticed it, but they might notice it at any moment. You know how talented the K.G.B. is. You know that the Soviet Union is not a country of professionals; it is not America. The Soviet people are not naive, but they are not professionals. Yet there is one organization that is very professional, the K.G.B. And their profession is to instill fear in people and then use this fear to destroy you. The moment they feel you are weak, they are ready to work on you. I had to do something about this. And then I began to realize why I, who had been so self-assured, who had played with them as though they were boys, suddenly lost my confidence, why I was so scared. It was one thing when you were in the midst of the struggle, when your friends

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were with you, when sometimes on a lucky day you could call your wife, when you could give an interview, and in the evening switch on *Voice of America*, and give yourself the chance to hear the reaction of the West to your statement and to our demonstration. You feel isolated, and you realize that the only way to the outer world is through these K.G.B. guys, that right now nobody can find out what is happening to you. And you start thinking that maybe you have to compromise. When I recognized this problem, I understood that I had to restore this feeling of togetherness with my friends, and not with the K.G.B. I had to restore the feeling of the free man I had had all these years. Then, as in psychotraining, before, during and after interrogation, instead of listening to them, I started to concentrate on the dearest moments spent with my wife Avital, on how the struggle for human rights was taking place, and on trying to imagine what these people were doing now in America, in Israel, in Moscow. When you try to think only about these things for days on end, at some moment you get the feeling that, after all, nothing has changed. You were struggling two miles from this prison in your Moscow apartment. Now they have moved you to this prison, but your friends continue their opposition, and you continue to do the same.

It is the same struggle that you continue in a slightly different situation; it's only physically different; morally, spiritually, it is the same. A punishment cell, where you are for hundreds and hundreds of days, is a very little room, five or six feet by four, very cold, no warm clothing, three pieces of bread, three cups of water, nothing to read, nothing to write, dark, cold. The K.G.B. understands how dangerous this is for them. That is why they constantly try to deprive you of all your memories, of all contact with people who are dear to you. They took away my psalmbook. It was very important to me, because some days before my arrest I had received it with a letter saying, "I kept this psalmbook with me for more than a year, and now I feel the time has come for you to have it." Some days after they arrested me, I demanded that they return it to me. (When my father died I was reading this psalmbook for the first time in my life, and understood maybe ten percent of it.) They said "We are obliged under the law to protect you against harmful influences, such as religion." These types of influence undermine all of their work. For years they have been mobilizing hundreds of thousands of K.G.B. men, interrogators and so on, to destroy a few dozen people who don't accept this gift from the government.

I remember, after one hundred and ten days of a hunger strike,

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that they retreated and permitted me to write letters to my mother and to Avital in Israel. For a year they wouldn't let me send a single letter. It looked like a miracle—when I thought I was dying. They retreated because of strong pressure, a public campaign in my support. Three years later, already in the time of Gorbachev, in the same prison, in the same cell, after the same hunger strike, virtually with the same demands, my Russian dissident friend died. He died because there was less pressure, and in his case, the sensitivity of the Soviet Union was less. Soon after, they arranged a meeting with my mother. The reason quickly became clear. My mother told me that the Madrid conference was coming to an end, and the American government demanded my release. The Soviet government said that if Sharansky would sign a statement that because of his health he asks the government to be humane and to release him, without even mentioning that he admits committing a crime, he will be released. My mother said that the American officials believed that it was a very big concession and that I should accept it. Of course Avital didn't urge me to sign, because she understood that I could not do it, and I didn't do it.

Suddenly, there came the interesting moment of my release, when they took me from the punishment cell and brought me to the hospital and started feeding me with two kilos, five kilos, ten kilos of food—it was twenty-five percent of my weight. Now I've added another twenty pounds. My wife says that one of the reasons she doesn't want me to go to America is that I return each time with another five pounds. They were giving me different kinds of injections, and I suddenly felt much better. My heart started to work better, I could do my morning exercises, etcetera. Then four K.G.B. men took me to a huge airplane, containing about a hundred seats, with me and them on board. In the good old days they shared a cab with me and I wanted them to pay half; this time they shared a plane with me, and they paid it all.

Then you find out that *there* you had to say no to the K.G.B. men in order to be free, and *here*, now that you are released, all your friends who were fighting for you feel that your life is their life, and they want a piece of it. You understand that you have to say no to them, and it is much more difficult to say no to your dear friend who has been fighting for you than to the K.G.B., I can assure you. And then you notice, especially coming to America, that you are lost in all these fantastic choices. Bloomingdale's—thank God I haven't been

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in Bloomingdale's—because even in little shops I am lost; that is why I was afraid to go there. Even the choice between all the types of orange juice or cereal in the morning—I can't understand how you Americans have so many cereals. You have so many nice choices, but you spend all your lives on such things. When you have thought about more serious things, day and night, in a Soviet prison, then you notice that your life has now become very shallow. So then you think, "Well, who knows, maybe Gorbachev will go so far in his reforms that he will permit me to go for two weeks, no more of course, to a punishment cell, and there I'll really have some time to think about important matters."

But where does our power come from? I became free only when I went back to my roots. And then I could speak for my people and for the others. I remember that seventy years ago we came from the same roots. During these seventy years there was a revolution and Russian revolutionary programs that destroyed Jewish culture, among other things. Then of course, there were the Nazis and the Holocaust, and finally there was Israel. And if you survived it was only because you were coming back to our roots, because you remembered that freedom is inseparable from the Soviet Jews and from the rest of the people. That is exactly the feeling I have these days: that I cannot be free until the rest of the Soviet people are free. That is what keeps me going, pushing people to organize demonstrations, to continue pressing Gorbachev.

I respect President Reagan for what he did during the recent summit conference: he put human rights in the center of the negotiations, and he met the *refusniks* and dissidents, which gave them so much publicity. But after this he said, "And now I understand that it is all in bureaucratic hands." I can understand that he wanted to be nice to the Soviet Union, but he almost nullified his own message. We must remember that people in the Soviet Union still are viewed as the property of the government. There are exciting changes in Soviet policy, but the Soviet Union will go only as far as we push it toward releasing our people. The government is only concerned about how to save the Soviet economy, how to mobilize its own resources and Western resources to save the economy. In this respect Gorbachev is definitely a realist; he understands the dangers of his system better than anybody else. But the fate of hundreds of thousands depends on our ability to link his interests with our interests and to continue to press them.

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Questions and Answers

Roger Rosenblat: For Americans it is very hard to evaluate the so-called "new" Soviet Union. How realistic are *glasnost* and *perestroika* as policies, given the economic, social, and governmental structure of the Soviet Union, and the things it depends upon?

Natan Sharansky: I'd say that the policy is not realistic but idealistic, because the intentions of Gorbachev—a Soviet leader loyal to the Communist system that made his career, with the help of the K.G.B.—are, in fact, very good. He understands that the system is in danger. He said in one of his first speeches—surprising everyone by his novel views—that our economy is in trouble and it is urgent that we do something about it if we are not to lose out in our competition with capitalism. He is the first leader who said any such thing. Before him only Sakharov and dissidents were saying this. He understands now that collectivism and industrialization was a mistake, that a rigid system was in fact a mistake. However, to make it even a little less rigid happens to be very difficult, because the moment you make it less rigid you must grant more freedoms, and you see what is happening already in Crimea, Lithuania, Armenia. And he immediately has to set limits to these movements. On the other hand, he wants to be aided by the resources of the West. Here I think he has more choices, because he also knows how to impress the West. That is why I keep saying that we can get from Gorbachev what we couldn't get from any other leader. Well, we don't know whether he did it, but he started doing it. Everyone was saying no to the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, but when Gorbachev saw that the West was firm and that without it there would be no economic or other concessions, he acceded. The same could be done with human rights, though so far his limits are very quickly reached. If you look at the history of Russia as well as of the Soviet Union, you will see that Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Speransky, and Khrushchev were all great reformers. All were trying to use the West for their reforms and to copy Western systems. In each case, after a few years they began to retreat, or they were overthrown and there was considerable bloodshed.

RR: What has been the effect of a case like yours on the life of Soviet Jews now in the Soviet Union? Has life improved, or is it more difficult?

NS: First of all, it is easier to leave the Soviet Union. Here, I think,

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Gorbachev demonstrated perhaps the most sophisticated part of *glasnost*. He almost disbanded the institution of prisons for Zionists and *refusniks*, the means by which they used to frighten the others. He gave to the West as personal presents most, not all, of those *refusniks* and dissidents for whom they were fighting. The level of emigration is almost ten times as high as it was a year ago. Nevertheless, it is much less than it was in the best Brezhnev days. Dictator Brezhnev, however, for letting fifteen thousand Jews go, could never dream of getting the compliments which liberator Gorbachev is getting for ten thousand. And Gorbachev also has enacted a new law that, for more than a year, has allowed only those who have immediate relatives abroad to apply for visas. So, from more than 370,000 Jews who had already made their first decision to go, if this law is strictly enforced, more than ninety percent now cannot even apply. But the impression of liberalization is so strong that there is almost no criticism. On the other hand, *glasnost* and *perestroika* so far have done virtually nothing for the restoration of Jewish culture. No Jewish schools have been permitted; no books in Hebrew are published; there are no new synagogues, and there is only one rabbi for the entire Soviet Union, who is used mainly for public relations, in trips to America. There is one kosher restaurant, which exists mainly on the pages of *The New York Times:* it consists of a room with three tables, to which a rabbi invites foreign correspondents, and then we read in *The Times* that for the first time in over seventy years you can sit and eat kosher food in the Soviet Union. Still, we have to understand that *glasnost* permits new opportunities. We can bring more literature in; we can have much more contact with the Jews in the Soviet Union. Without using *glasnost*, without trying to test its limits, we will get nothing.

RR: You are familiar with the imprisonments of prison. Now that you have been out for awhile, what are the imprisonments of freedom?

NS: I think the main aspect of freedom is that there is a constant temptation to make life superficial. Of course, it is very tempting to make life more and more comfortable, but there are no limits to it, and you don't really notice when the means for making life more comfortable become your end. In prison you have only one aim: to be free inside the prison. Well, Western prisons are better; you have the opportunity to leave them. But then you have the problem of having too many choices. In the Soviet Union, whether you want to

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or not, you have one aim. And that's what gives life a meaning. For example, a Soviet prison is a fantastically good school for learning tolerance. I think it is the freest place in the Soviet Union and maybe the most tolerant place in the world. Imagine, in one cell there sits a Ukrainian nationalist, a Jewish nationalist, a Lithuanian Catholic, a Communist, a monarchist, and a trade union activist, and all of them have not only to talk to one another, but what in the free world is impossible, they struggle together against the K.G.B. That is a real school of thought, of political science.

RR: But you are not advocating the experience.

NS: No, I am not advocating it, but at times, looking at some ordinary, intolerant people, I think that a few weeks in a Soviet prison would be a good school.

RR: What do you feel should be the role of American Jews in influencing American foreign policy vis-á-vis the Soviet dissidents?

NS: Jews must understand first of all that in acting on behalf of the Soviet Jews and on behalf of defending human rights in the Soviet Union, they are not simply a Jewish lobby in their own country. They are acting, in fact, in the interest of the West, in the interest of their own country. One little example: When I was trying to mobilize many people for a demonstration in Washington, one of the arguments was, "Why should we, Jews, spoil the atmosphere of détente? They'll think that our problems are more important," and so on. And when the demonstration was over, they said how important what we did was for America.

RR: How do you feel about the situation with the Palestinians? Also, how do you feel about American reaction to this situation?

NS: Israel definitely has serious problems, maybe the most serious challenge which we have had since the creation of our state. But we have had this challenge from the beginning: how to survive. How to survive in the sea of Arab states, whose aim is to destroy the state of Israel. How to protect yourself against the reign of terror. At the same time, how to be a genuinely democratic state, with respect for the human rights of Jews and Arabs.

My problem is that each time I am asked about human rights in Israel and the problem of the Palestinians, the question is formulated in this way: "You, as a Soviet Jew who suffered in the Soviet Union, now must understand the Palestinian situation in Israel, because their fight and your fight are the same." And each time I have to stop people and say, "I'm sorry, but with all my experience

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and knowledge of the realm of Israel—of course I am not such an expert here as on the Gulag—there is absolutely no way to compare a totalitarian regime that has tried to destroy you as an individual, to deprive you of your language, your right to read, to write, to decide whether to live here or to leave this country, in a word, where you feel yourself simply the property of the state—and that is the struggle in the Soviet Union—with the struggle, the dilemma of the state of Israel, which has all the democratic institutions that can exist only in our society." We have a free press, at least as open and critical as in America. We have a variety of opposition parties, we have all sorts of juridical commissions, and so on. After all, I saw an Israeli prison, and after being in Soviet prison, there is no comparison.

I've been speaking with a number of Arabs who were supposed to be the most moderate Arabs, in eastern Jerusalem and other places. The biggest tragedy of the Palestinian people is that for the seventy years of our existence those very few leaders who tried to move in the direction of accepting our right to exist and negotiating with us were simply killed. I said to one of the moderates, perhaps not as moderate as I would like, but much more moderate than the P.L.O., "Say publicly what you just told me. Publish it tomorrow in *The Jerusalem Post*, and we'll at least start negotiations." He replied: "That will mean that the next day I will be killed." It is virtually impossible to have negotiations without a partner. It is impossible to make peace with your own shadow. I think that at some moment we will have to take some unilateral steps to diffuse the situation, without waiting for the partner, in fact ignoring him.

The Western press is disappointing. I was recently with the army in the middle of a riot, although I was in civil defense, and many of my friends who were coming from Gaza and the West Bank were telling me what was happening every day. We asked ourselves if the shootings were in accord with the moral principles of our state. In the Soviet Union we don't have any discussions about Afghanistan. The Soviet government orders you to fight, and you know you shouldn't question it. Here, it is a real problem for each of us, left, right, religious, unreligious; And we demanded that top officials of our army tell us exactly what kind of orders they are giving, how they've improved, what kind of investigations they are conducting, how they put on trial those soldiers who have beaten Palestinians, and so on. But here in America everything becomes black and white, not so much in the press as on television, where the bad Israeli

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soldier is beating the good young Palestinian boy, and it seems difficult to understand why. American Jews can do much to clarify the situation, by providing a better understanding of what is happening and influencing public opinion in the West.

RR: Why does the Soviet Union prevent Soviet Jews from assimilating by encouraging anti-Semitism? Also, someone said if people get the government they deserve, are the Soviets worthy of a free government? Is there some relation between the two? American Jews try to walk a line between their religion and their country, to find some roots and level of comfort in both. But the Soviet Union, by your and others' depiction of it, makes that kind of compromise impossible.

NS: There is now in the Soviet Union an anti-Semitic organization, called "Memory," and though its members speak not about Jews but about Zionists, they hate assimilated Jews more than Zionists. They try to marry our girls and our boys, thinking they will improve their stock.

The state originally said that Jews were not a nation; it was said by Lenin and then by Stalin. Of course, Jews could not be a religion, because all religions were prohibited. In America, Jews are a religion; in the Soviet Union they are a nation. Yet in spite of the fact that they are not a nation, their identification cards carry the words *nation: Jew.* In the fifties, sixties, and seventies, they considered using passports without such identification as Russian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, and so on, but it was not done because they wanted to specify who were Jews. They don't trust us. And I think this distrust is deeply rooted in distrust of the Jewish mentality.

As to whether people have the government they deserve, I don't think it is racist to say that all people are not the same. Every nation is different, every nation has its own type of mentality. Racism begins when we say that one nation is better than another. The Russian people traditionally, if you look at their history, are different in their mentality. If you look at their language, the government is a parent: the same words are used for the government, for the good tsar, as for the parents.

If today there were free elections in Russia, it is clear that Armenia and Lithuania would want to separate from Russia. And there would be two candidates: Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn. With all my respect and love for Sakharov with whom I have worked so closely, I am sure Solzhenitsyn would be chosen because he ad-

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vocates the type of society in which the majority of Russians want to live. I think that they have the right to live in this type of society. The problem appears when there is an empire which forces other people with different types of mentality, with different types of relations between the individual and the state, to live inside a society that doesn't trust them and is afraid of them even when they are assimilated.

Political prisoners are a tiny, tiny minority, among five million *zeks* [prisoners] in the Soviet Union. But there is a very big group, many hundreds of thousand of those who have committed so-called economic crimes, which in America are not crimes. If you buy for one price and sell for another, that is a crime. A large percentage of these crimes are committed by Jews. Why? Because they have initiative. Also, the percentage of Jews is very high in economic and cultural dissent.

RR: If you could construct United States policy toward the Soviet Union, what would it be? What would be your most important objective? This clearly is an election-year question.

NS: From what I already have said, it is quite clear what I think American policies toward the Soviet Union should be. The Soviet Union is now seeking credits, private and state loans, computer and other technology from the West. I wouldn't say "No, let's stop all our connections with the Soviet Union." It is both impossible and undesirable. If the Soviets are ready to release all political prisoners, to permit emigration, say, to forty or fifty thousand, then America should be ready to support these measures of liberalization. In other words, the Soviets would know what they would be getting in exchange and that they could not cheat. Now, they make some nice gestures to create a good impression, and at the same time take some steps inside the Soviet Union to minimize the effects of these gestures. For example, instead of solving the problem of emigration, they are trying to sell every *refusnik* as a refugee for the highest possible price. If the United States had a clear program of linkage, the Soviets would not be able to use these people as hostages. At the same time they would be sure of really getting something in return.

RR: If they were trying to break you, trying their best to break your spirit, they might have put you in a psychiatric hospital and given you drugs. Don't they do this to political prisoners, and do you know why they didn't do this to you?

NS: Well, no one knows why they didn't. I know a number of people

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whom they put in a psychiatric hospital or threatened to. I noticed that, as a rule, they do it to people who they feel are naive, or unstable, or have very strong feelings, or are easily upset. And they probably felt that in my case they had less chance of success. But, also, from the very beginning of my arrest there was a very strong campaign on my behalf, and they probably were calculating that the entire world would know what was happening to me. After I was released, I found out that the Soviet government was receiving hundreds and hundreds of letters every day. I never saw those letters. They burned them. But those letters saved my life. This should remind us how important it is to demand the freedom of all political prisoners in the Soviet Union.

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Primo Levi

REFLECTIONS ON WRITING

Some books are dear to us without our being able to say exactly why: in such cases, by carrying our investigation just a bit deeper, it is probable that unsuspected affinities could be discovered, rich in revelations as regards the least obvious aspects of our character. But other books accompany us for years, for life, and the reason is clear, accessible, easy to express in words: among these, with reverence and love, I dare to mention *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, the colossal but only work by Rabelais, "mon maître." The strange fate of this book is known: born from the love of life and cultivated leisure of Rabelais, this monk, physician, philologist, traveler and humanist, it grew and proliferated with an absolute lack of plan for almost twenty years and more than one thousand pages, accumulating the most extravagant inventions in full imaginative freedom, half a robust popular epic of buffoonery, half imbued with the vigorous and vigilant moral consciousness of a great Renaissance spirit. On each page we encounter, daringly juxtaposed, inspired, ribald, or jejune scurrilities, and at the same time quotations (authentic and not, almost all quoted from memory) from Latin, Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew texts; dignified and resonant oratorical exercises; Aristotelian subtleties that give rise to gigantic laughter, while others are endorsed and validated with the good faith of a man whose life is pure.

If to this fundamentally discontinuous texture and its frequent linguistic difficulties one adds the violent criticisms and satires directed against the Roman Curia, it is easy to understand why at all times *Gargantua and Pantagruel* has found a limited audience, and why some have tried to pass it off, opportunely amputated and reshaped, as children's literature. And yet I only have to open it to find in it the book of today, I mean the book of all times, eternal, which speaks a language that will always be understood.

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It isn't that in it the fundamental themes of the human comedy are dealt with: on the contrary one would look in vain for the great traditional poetic sources, love, death, religious experience, precarious fate. In Rabelais there is no morose retreat into oneself, rethinking, inner searching: in every word of his there lives a different state of soul, fanciful, extrovert, substantially that of the innovator, the inventor (not the Utopian); the inventor of large and small things, and also that of the "*bosin*," the extemporaneous "barker" at a country fair. At any rate this perennial return is not accidental; it is known that the book had an obscure precursor, which disappeared for centuries without a trace: a country fair almanac, *Chroniques du grand Géant Gargantua.*

But the two giants of his dynasty are not only mountains of flesh, absurd drinkers and eaters: together, and paradoxically, they are the legitimate epigones of the giants who declared war on Jupiter, sprang from Nimrod and Goliath, and are at once enlightened princes and joyous philosophers. In Pantagruel's vast inspiration and vast laughter is enclosed the dream of the century, that of an industrious and productive humanity which turns its back on the darkness and resolutely walks towards a future of peaceful prosperity, toward the golden age described by the Latins, neither the past nor distantly future but within reach, provided the powerful of the earth do not abandon the path of reason and remain strong against external and internal enemies.

This is not an idyllic hope, it is a robust certainty. It is enough to want it and the world will be yours: it is enough to have education, justice, science, art, the laws, and the example of the ancients. God exists, but in the heavens: man is free, not predestined, he is *faber sui*, and must and can dominate the earth, the divine gift. Therefore the world is beautiful, it is full of joy, not tomorrow but today: because to each person is available the illustrious joys of virtue and knowledge, and also the bodily joys, they too a divine gift, of dizzily overflowing tables, "theological" drunks, and indefatigable sensual pleasures. To love men means to love them as they are, body and soul, *tripes et boyaux.*

Panurge, the only character in the book who has human dimensions and never trespasses into symbol and allegory, is an extraordinary hero in reverse, a condensation of a restless and curious humanity in whom much more than in Pantagruel, Rabelais seems to be sketching himself, his modern man's complexity, his con-

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tradications, unresolved and gaily accepted. Panurge, charlatan, pirate, *clerc*, by turns hoaxer and hoaxed, full of courage, "except when in danger," famished, penniless and dissolute, who appears on the scene begging for bread in all living and dead languages, Panurge is us, man. He is not exemplary, he is not "perfection," but he is humanity, alive because it seeks, sins, enjoys and knows.

How is this intemperate, pagan, terrestrial doctrine reconciled with the evangelical message, never denied nor forgotten by Rabelais's shepherd of souls? It is not reconciled at all: this too is intrinsic to the human condition of being suspended between the mire and the heavens, between nothing and the infinite. Rabelais's very life, as far as one knows, is a tangle of contradictions, a maelstrom of activities apparently incompatible with each other and with the image of the author as it is traditionally reconstructed from his writings.

A Franciscan monk, then (at the age of forty) a student of medicine and physician at the Lyons Hospital, publisher of scientific books and popular almanacs, scholar of jurisprudence, Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew, indefatigable traveler, astrologist, botanist, archaeologist, the friend of Erasmus, the precursor of Vesalius in the study of anatomy on the human corpse: one of the least inhibited of authors, he is at the same time the curate of Meudon. Throughout his life he enjoyed the reputation of a pious and irreproachable man; yet he leaves behind him (deliberately, one would say) the portrait of a sensual man, if not a satyr. We are far from, we are at the antipodes of the stoic wisdom of the golden mean. The Rabelesian teaching is extremist, it is the virtue of excess: not only are Gargantua and Pantagruel giants but the book itself is a giant, both as regards size and scope; gigantic and fabulous are the exploits, the revelries, the diatribes, the manhandling of mythology and history, the lists of words.

Gigantic above every other thing is Rabelais's and his creatures' capacity for joy. This boundless and luxuriating epic of satisfied flesh unexpectedly reaches heaven by a different route: because the man who feels joy is like the man who feels love, he is good, he is grateful to his Creator for having created him, and therefore he will be saved. For the rest, the carnality described by the extremely erudite Rabelais is so naive and natural as to disarm every intelligent censor: it is healthy and innocent and as irresistible as are the forces of nature.

Why is Rabelais close to us? He certainly does not resemble us,

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indeed he is rich in all the virtues that today's man, sad, shackled, and weary, lacks. He is close to us as a model, because of his merrily curious spirit, his amiable skepticism, his faith in tomorrow and in man; and also because of his way of writing, so alien to genres and rules. Perhaps we can trace back to him and his Abbey of Thelma that manner, which is triumphant today and so evident in Sterne and Joyce, of "writing as you please," without codes or precepts, following the thread of imagination, just as out of spontaneous necessity a carnival procession winds along, different and surprising at every turn. He is close to us, chiefly because in this boundless painter of terrestrial joys we perceive the permanent, firm consciousness matured through many experiences that not all of life is here. It would be difficult to find a single melancholy page in all of his work, and yet Rabelais knows human misery; he is silent about it because, also a good physician when he writes, he does not accept it, he wants to heal it:

Mieulx est de ris que de larmes escrire
Pour ce que rire est le propre de l'homme.

II.

After thirty-five years of apprenticeship and camouflaged or open "autobiographism," I decided one day to step over the embankment and try to write a novel without paying too much attention to the ongoing polemic as to whether the novel is alive or dead, and, if alive, whether it is in good health. Now that the enterprise is accomplished, and the book printed and in the bookstores, I have the agreeable impression of returning from an exotic trip, and like all those who return I want to tell about the things I've seen and "show the slides" to friends. It is well known that sometimes during those unasked-for exhibitions friends get bored; if so, in this case they have only to turn the page.

What does one feel when writing about invented things? Writing about things seen is easier than inventing, and less joyful. It is writing-describing: you have a trail, you dig into your close or distant memories, put the specimens in order (if you have a talent for it), catalogue them, then you pick up a kind of mental camera and snap: you can be a mediocre, good, or even "artistic" photographer; you can ennoble the things you portray, or report them in an impersonal, modest, and honest manner, or, on the contrary, give them a

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distorted, flat, unfocused, off-center, under- or over-exposed image; but in every case you are guided, held by the hand by the facts, you have ground under your feet.

Writing a novel is different, it is super-writing: you are no longer on the ground, you fly, with all the emotions, fears and enthusiasms of a pioneer in a biplane made of canvas, string and plywood; or better, in an anchored balloon whose mooring line has been cut. The first sensation, destined to be reduced later on to smaller dimensions, is one of unlimited, almost licentious freedom. You can choose whichever subject or event you wish, tragic, fantastic, or comic, lunar, solar, or saturnine; you can situate it in a time that runs from the First Day of Creation (or even before, why not?) until today, indeed the remotest future, which you are entitled to mold at your will. You can set your story where you wish: in the living room of your own house, the empyrean, the court of Tamerlane, the hold of a fishing boat, inside a red blood cell, at the bottom of a mine, or in a brothel: in short, in any place you have seen or in places you've heard described, or read about, or seen at the movies or in a photograph, or imagined, imaginary, imaginable, unimaginable.

All of the Earth is yours, indeed the cosmos; and if the cosmos seems tight to you, you can invent another that suits you. If it obeys the laws of physics and common sense, fine; if not, fine all the same, or perhaps even better; in any case, you will not unleash catastrophe, at the most some picayune reader will write you to express urbanely his disappointment or his dissent. In short, aside from the time you'll have wasted, the risk you run is not greater than that of the student writing an essay in class: at the worst, you'll get a bad mark. Isn't this a wonderful trade?

When it comes to the characters, things become a bit more complicated. On this theme, the *ménage à trois* among author, character, and reader, tons of books have been written, but since I now have become a member of the crew, I take the liberty of giving you a piece of my mind, that is, showing my slides. Also where the characters are concerned, at the beginning one has the impression of a boundless freedom. In the abstract you have an absolute power over them, such as no tyrant on the face of the earth ever had. You can give them life, as dwarfs or giants, you can afflict them, torture them, kill them, resurrect them; or give them the gift of beauty and eternal youth, strength, the wisdom you do not have, the happiness of every moment (but will you be able to describe this without boring

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your reader?), love, wealth, and genius. But only in the abstract, because you are tied to them more than it may seem.

Every one of these phantasms is born from you, has your blood, for good or evil. It is your bloom. Worse, it is a spy assigned to you, reveals a part of you, your tensions, like those glass tassels that are used to reveal whether a crack in the wall is bound to grow wider. They are your way of saying "I": when you make them move or speak, reflect on what you are doing for they might say too much. Perhaps they will live longer than you, perpetuating your vices and errors.

The characters of a book are in truth strange creatures. They have neither skin nor blood nor flesh, they have less reality than a painting or a nocturnal dream, they have no substance but words, black doodles on a white sheet of paper, and yet you pass the time with them, converse with them through the centuries, hate them, love them, fall in love with them. Every one of them is a depository of certain rights, and knows how to enforce them, have them recognized. Your freedom as author is only apparent. If, once having conceived your homunculus, you thwarted it, if you want to impose on him a gesture contrary to his nature, or forbid him an act which will be congenial to him, you meet with resistance, muted but indubitable: as if you tried to command your hand to touch a red-hot iron or an object which repells you (or it). He, the nonexistent, is there—he is, he weighs, pushes against your hand: wants and does not want, silent and stubborn. If you persevere, he becomes morose. He withdraws, ceases to collaborate with you, to prompt you with his lines; he loses body, becomes flat, thin, white. He is paper and turns back into paper.

There also is another way in which your freedom of invention is apparent. Just as it is impossible to transform a real person into a character, that is, fashion an objective undistorted biography of him, so it is impossible to perform the reverse operation, to coin a character without pouring into it not only your moods as the author but also fragments of people you have met or of other characters.

The first impossibility is demonstrated by thousands of years of literature. The success of the written portrait is always limited, even in the best texts: the entire *Odyssey* is not enough to give us the image of Ulysses, but not even in the novel in the classic mode, or in the straight biography, where the author strives to describe for you the height of his subject, the color of his hair, eyes, and complexion,

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the shape of his body, his way of speaking, laughing, gesticulating. not even here, ever, due to the essential inadequacy of our expressive means, is *mimesis* attained. The movies and television attain it with closer approximation; in fact the filmed takes of dead people move us to a much greater degree than written portraits. They perturb us: the man whom we see move and speak on the screen really is not completely dead. And if holograms will make us the gift of a third dimension, our perturbation will be enormously greater, it will strike us as black magic. Trying to compete with such media is for a writer a waste of time.

But the impossibility of creating a character from nothing seems to me just as iron-clad. I already said that inevitably the author transfers into it (knowingly or not, willingly or not, sometimes becoming aware of it only when rereading his pages years after having written them) a part of himself; but the rest, the not-self, is never completely invented. It swarms with memories: these too, conscious or unconscious, voluntary or not. The character that you naively believe you have manufactured in your workshop reveals itself to be a chimera, a mosaic of tesserae, of shots snapped at some mysterious time and relegated to the attic of memory. In short a conglomerate that you will have the merit to have brought to life and made credible; but I do not believe that one can lay down rules for this art of producing an organism from a pile of odds and ends.

One can enunciate negative rules; it is not necessary for your character to be virtuous, attractive, or wise, nor is it necessary for him to be consistent with himself; indeed perhaps the contrary is true. The too-consistent character is predictable, that is, boring: he does not have impulses, he is programmed, he doesn't have free will. He must be inconsistent as we all are, have changing moods, make mistakes, get lost, grow from page to page, or fade away: if he remains the same he will not be the simulacrum of a creature but the simulacrum of a statue, that is, a double simulacrum.

Of course, beneath this inconsistency there is a deeper consistency, but to define it is beyond my abilities; whether it has been respected one knows afterwards when the page is written, and the signal is given by the reader's blood which for a few minutes circulates a trifle warmer and a trifle faster.

III.

It often happens that a reader, usually a young person,

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will ask a writer, in all simplicity, why he has written a certain book, or why he has written in this way, or even, more generally, why does he write and why do writers write. To this last question, which contains all the others, there is no easy answer: not always is a writer aware of the reasons that induce him to write, not always is he impelled by only one reason, not always do the same reasons stand behind the beginning and end of the same work. It seems to me that at least nine motivations can be identified, and I will try to describe them; but the reader, whether he is of the same trade or not, will have no difficulty in finding other reasons. Why, then, does one write?

1) Because one feels the drive and need to do so. This at a first approximation is the most disinterested reason. The author who writes because something or someone dictates to him from within does not work with an end in view; he may obtain fame and glory from his work, but they'll be a bonus, an additional benefit, not consciously sought: in short, a by-product. Admittedly, the case outlined is extreme, theoretical, asymptomatic; it is doubtful that there ever existed a writer—or in general an artist—so pure of heart. That's how the romantics saw themselves; not by chance we believe that we find such examples among the great men farthest from us in time, about whom we know little and who can therefore be idealized more easily. For the same reason the most distant mountains appear to be of one color, which often blends with the color of the sky.

2) To entertain others and oneself. Fortunately these two variants almost always coincide: it is rare that the person who writes to entertain his audience is not entertained by his writing, and it is rare that the person who enjoys writing does not transmit at least a portion of his enjoyment to his reader. In contrast to the preceding case, there exist pure entertainers, often not writers by profession, alien to ambition, whether literary or otherwise, lacking cumbersome convictions and dogmatic rigidities, light and limpid like children, lucid and wise like someone who has lived for a long time and not in vain. The first name that comes to mind is that of Lewis Carroll, the timid dean and mathematician who lived a blameless life and fascinated six generations with the adventures of his Alice, first in Wonderland and then behind the Looking Glass. The confirmation of his affable genius is found in the favor that his books enjoy after more than a century of life, not only with children, to whom he ideally dedicated them, but with logicians and psychoanalysts who

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never cease finding ever new meanings in his pages. It is likely that the uninterrupted success of his books is due precisely to the fact that they do not smuggle anything over on us, neither lessons in morality nor didactic efforts.

3) To teach something to someone. To do this and do it well can be valuable for the reader but only if the terms are clearly stated. Except for rare exceptions, such as Virgil's *Georgics*, the didactic intention corrodes the narrative canvas from underneath, degrades and contaminates it: the reader who looks for a story must find a story and not a lesson he does not want. But, of course, there are exceptions, and whoever has the blood of a poet knows how to find and express poetry also when talking about stars, atoms, cattle-breeding, and the raising of bees. I would not like to shock anyone by mentioning here *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well* by Pelligrino Artusi, another man of pure heart who speaks without riddles: he does not pose as a literary man, passionately loves the art of the kitchen despised by hypocrites and dyspeptics, sets out to teach it, says as much, does so with the simplicity and clarity of someone who knows his subject deeply, and spontaneously produces a work of art.

4) To improve the world. As can be seen, we are getting further and further away from the art that is an end in itself. It is appropriate to remark here that the motivations we are discussing have very little importance as regards the value of the work which they may originate; a book can be good, serious, durable, and pleasing for reasons quite different from those for which it was written. Ignoble books can be written for the most noble reasons, and also, but more infrequently, noble books for ignoble reasons. However, I personally have a certain distrust for whoever "knows" how to improve the world; often but not always he is someone so enamored of his system as to become impervious to criticism. It is to be hoped that he does not possess too strong a will, otherwise he will be tempted to change the world with deeds and not merely words: this is what Hitler did after writing *Mein Kampf*, and I have often thought that many other Utopians, if they had had sufficient energy, would have unleashed wars and slaughters.

5) To make one's ideas known. He who writes for this reason represents only a reduced and therefore less dangerous version of the preceding case. In fact this category coincides with that of philosophers, be they geniuses, mediocre, presumptuous, lovers of mankind, dilettantes or madmen.

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6) To free oneself from anguish. Often writing represents the equivalent of a confession on Freud's couch. I have no objection to the writer driven by conflicts: on the contrary, I hope he will be able to free himself from them in this way, as happened to me many years ago. I ask him, however, to make an effort to filter his anguish, not to fling it as it is, rough and raw, into the face of the reader: otherwise he risks infecting others without getting rid of it himself.

7) To become famous. I believe that only a madman would sit down to write just be become famous; but I also believe that no writer, not even the most unassuming, not even the least presumptuous, not even the angelic Carroll mentioned above, was ever untouched by this motivation. To be famous, to read about oneself in the newspapers, to be talked about—all this is sweet, there is no doubt; but few of the joys that life can offer cost so much effort, and few efforts have such an uncertain result.

8) To become rich. I do not understand why some people become indignant or are surprised when they discover that Collodi, Balzac, and Dostoevsky wrote to make money or pay gambling debts, or plug up leaks caused by bankrupt commercial enterprises. It seems right to me that writing, like any other useful activity, should be recompensed. But I believe that writing only for money is dangerous because it almost always leads to a facile manner, too obsequious to the taste of the largest audience and the fashion of the moment.

9) Out of habit. I have left for last this motivation, which is the saddest. It is not good but it happens: it happens that the writer exhausts his propellant, his narrative charge, his desire to give life and shape to the images he has conceived; that he no longer conceives images; that he no longer desires anything, even glory or money; and that he writes all the same, out of inertia, out of habit, "to keep his name in print." He should be careful about what he is doing: he will not go far along that road, he will inevitably end up copying himself. Silence is more dignified, whether it be temporary or definitive.

IV.

Dear Sir,

I hope you will forgive me if I answer your letter of . . . publicly, omitting of course your name and whatever else could reveal your identity. However, for the benefit of all those who are in

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your situation, or in a similar situation, and who like you have written to me, I am forced to reveal at least this: that you are twenty-seven years old, live in a small town, have finished classical *liceo* without excessive efforts, and now have with great difficulty found a modest job which gives you a little money, a certain security, and scant gratification.

You want to write and, more precisely, to tell stories; and in fact you do write but want advice and orientation from me: how to write. You do not pose for me, and do not pose for yourself the fundamental dilemma, that is, whether to write or not, and in so doing put me in an awkward position from the start. In fact, from what you tell me one must assume that you think of storytelling as a trade, whereas in my opinion it is not.

In Italy, today, every trade coincides with a guarantee: he who lives on writing has no guarantees. As a consequence, pure storytellers, those who gain their living from their creativity alone, are very few: they are not more than a couple of dozen. The others write in their spare time, devoting the rest of their time to publicity, journalism, publishing, the cinema, teaching, or other activities that have nothing to do with writing. So in the first place I suggest, indeed I prescribe, that you hold on to your job.

If you truly have the blood of a writer, you will find the time for writing no matter what, it will grow around you: and, for all that, your daily work, boring though it may be, cannot help but supply you with precious raw materials for your evening or Sunday writing, beginning with human contacts, beginning with boredom itself. Boredom is boring by definition, but a discourse on boredom can be a vital and exciting exercise for the reader: you who have studied the classics in school certainly already know this.

But you skip this fork in the road and yet expect from me practical and specific advice: the secrets of the trade, indeed, the nontrade. They exist, I cannot deny it, but luckily they have no general validity; I say "luckily" because, if they did, all writers would write in the same way, thus generating such an enormous mass of boredom as to render vain any attempt to pass it off as Leopardian, and to trip the automatic switches of the most indulgent readers due to overload. Therefore I will have to confine myself to telling you my personal secrets, at the risk of forming with my own hands the competitor who, despite my "introduction," will chase me out of the market.

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The first secret is the rest period in the drawer, and I believe it has a general value. Between the first draft and the final one a few days must pass; for reasons which I do not know, for a certain period of time the eye of the writer is not very sensitive to the recent text. It is necessary, so to speak, for the ink to dry well; before that, the flaws elude you: repetitions, logical gaps, improprieties, grating, off-key notes.

An excellent surrogate for the rest period can be a guinea-pig reader endowed with common sense and good taste, not too indulgent: one's spouse, a friend. Not another writer: a writer is not a typical reader, he has preferences and peculiar fixations; faced by an inept text he is disdainful, faced by a beautiful text he is envious. I am contravening this rest period concept at this very moment, because as soon as I have written this letter I shall mail it; so you will be able to verify its validity.

After the ripening period, which assimilates a piece of writing to wine, perfumes and medlars, there comes the time to decant, refine. One almost always realizes that one has sinned by excess, that the text is redundant, repetitive, prolix: or at least, I repeat, that's what happens to me. Incorrigibly, in the first draft I address myself to an obtuse reader, who has to have the concepts hammered into his head. After the thinning down, the writing is more agile: it approaches what, more or less consciously, is my goal, that of maximum information with minimum clutter.

Take note that one can attain the maximum of information by various paths, some quite subtle; one, fundamental, is the choice of synonyms which almost never are equivalent to each other. There is always one which is "more right" than the others: but often it is necessary to look for it, depending on the context, in the old Tommaseo, or among the neologisms of the new Zingarelli, or among the barbarisms stupidly prohibited by the traditionalists, even among the terms of other languages; if there is no Italian term, why go in for contortions?

In this research, it seems to me important to keep alive the awareness of the original meaning of each word; if, for example, you remember that "to unleash" meant to free from leashes (bonds), you will be able to use the term in a more appropriate manner and in less threadbare senses. Not all readers will notice the artifice, but they will at least perceive that the choice wasn't obvious, that you have worked for them, that you have not followed the line of least resistance.

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After ninety years of psychoanalysis, and successful or failed attempts to pour the unconscious directly onto the page, I have an acute need for clarity and rationality, and I think that the majority of readers feel the same way. A clear text is not perforce elementary; it can be read at several levels, but the lowest level, in my opinion, should be accessible to a broad public. Do not be afraid of doing an injustice to your id by gagging it, there is no danger; "the tenant on the floor below" will find a way to show up in any case, because writing means laying oneself bare: even the most fastidious writer bares himself. If you do not like to bare yourself, be satisfied with your present job. Oh, I forgot to tell you that, in order to write, one must have something to write.

With best regards, your

Primo Levi

Translated from the Italian by Raymond Rosenthal

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Jules Olitski

MY FIRST NEW YORK SHOW

When I was young I longed for Kahnweiler; my Kahnweiler, the one who would be for me what the legendary one had been for Picasso, Gris, Braque, and the others. What a Kahnweiler! He would understand my art, and he would love me—oh, my Kahnweiler could bring tears to my eyes.

Starting out in 1940 it never occurred to me that I would make money out of my art. How I would make my living was a scary question; I didn't feel, apart from making art, that I was much good at anything. Times are different now, given our current art scene; an aspiring artist might well expect a quick mix of fame and fortune arriving around the same time as his or her pubic hair.

For myself, I foresaw tough times, even martyrdom. Like a sponge, I soaked up angst. I saw myself in Rembrandtesque light, while in surrounding shadow art critics skulked, impatient to feed. But Kahnweiler stood by me and when my art triumphed, as it was destined to do, and finally, finally fame and fortune and an adoring Jean Harlow were mine, he was there, old and bald as a saint. I imagined Paul Muni in the part.

What I did not foresee is what it would feel like time after time, year after year, for my art to be turned down. In a piece I wrote for *Partisan Review* in 1978, I said: "There is value in long years of obscurity, if one doesn't go insane or become suicidal, in that, simply because nobody is looking, the habit of fooling around and trying things out gets ingrained. . . . " True, but there must be a better way.

As for Kahnweiler, he never came. I've known (and still know) some absolutely first-rate art dealers—my friend André Emmerich, for example—but I learned along the way that there never is, or likely will be, a Kahnweiler. Even the real Daniel Henry Kahnweiler, I suspect, was not a Kahnweiler.

Many years ago I heard someone say: "The greatest cause of human misery lies in confusing expectations with reality." I am a slow learner. My childish fantasy lasted well into middle age—and even now in my mid-sixties, every now and then, I am haunted by its ghost.

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I was in my early thirties when I began looking in earnest for my Kahnweiler. I told myself I wasn't necessarily aiming for a one-man show; one or two paintings in a group show now and then would be enough for the time being. I just wanted a foot inside a door. That's what I told myself, between dreams.

I had come back to New York after two years in Paris, on the G.I. Bill (and had had my first one-man show in a tiny gallery on the rue St. Julien le Pauvre, called Galerie Huit). I was divorced. I had brought my infant daughter to my parents in Brooklyn to be taken care of until, euphemistically, as they put it, "You could get back on your feet." I was close to broke and living in a cold-water flat in Hell's Kitchen. I don't imagine that anyone I knew believed I had much of a future; I sure as hell didn't.

Somewhere I'd read that peanuts could provide most, if not all of the nutrients anyone needed to stay reasonably healthy. I lived on peanuts and coffee. As I said, I was close to broke. I had an army disability pension, but most of it went to my parents for the care of my daughter. Much as I liked peanuts and coffee, sooner or later I would get hankerings after meat, drink, and cigarettes. I stole. I stole art supplies. I filled the deep pockets of my army overcoat with tubes of oil paint. I stole canvas. I stole books. I fancied myself a sort of Robin Hood, stealing from the rich and giving to the poor: me. I was scared all the time, even when filching a five-cent Baby Ruth. While I planned bank robberies down to the most exquisite details, in my mind's eye, I always saw myself, right in the middle of everything, pistol in hand, fainting away from terror on a cold marble floor.

None of this was fun. Why didn't I climb out of the hole I was in? I don't know why. I was numb. There was a cafeteria on 42nd Street where I would sit at a table all night nursing a coffee; I couldn't sleep in the cold-water flat. At night rats took over; my mattress was on the floor. I'd find book bindings chewed and wet when I'd come home at daybreak.

I did make a stab at honest work. I got a job as a "barker" standing outside the Victoria movie theater in Times Square, in a uniform a Libyan general might envy, chanting, "Feature begins in five minutes . . . going in now . . . immediate seating . . . feature begins in. . . . " I was so good at this that the manager set me to work inside answering the phone; when callers asked what movie was on and what it was about, I made up fake plots: usually about a

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starving artist in love with Jean Harlow; sentenced to die in the electric chair for killing a bank guard—the gun went off accidentally as the hero fainted—he is rescued by an art dealer named Kahnweiler, played by Paul Muni. People complained that the movie they'd paid for was not the one described on the phone. I was fired.

The time had come to begin my career as a professional artist. I chose four paintings that I could just about manage to carry—two under each arm. Off I went to 57th Street, to try my luck with the lesser-known galleries where I thought I might have more of a chance. I drew a blank, a monotonous blank. "We don't need you, we don't need you, we don't need you." Or the refrain was varied with, "You're good, but we don't need you." I decided to try an important gallery. Why not?

My appointment at the Charles Egan Gallery on East 57th Street was for a bit after ten. No one was around until Mr. Egan appeared with a drink in hand. He offered me one. I figured this was the sort of thing Kahnweiler might have done. A good beginning that got even better when he looked at my paintings and said, "Not bad, not bad—as good as any of these guys." He waved a hand at the paintings on the walls. A group show was on; I remember a de Kooning and a Franz Kline among others. But that was as good as it got, because he went on to say, "I'm not gonna take you on." When I asked why not since I was as good as "these guys," his reply was as cheery as the sliver of ice shrinking to nothing in his drink. "Who needs you when I've got *them*?" Again that wave at the walls.

I said something about how I could use some encouragement, that I wasn't a kid, that I'd been around "and just knowing my paintings are here, in a gallery—all I'm asking is to be in a group show," but nothing doing. He wasn't taking on any artists that year.

"How about next year?"

"No."

"Two years, three years—five years. I don't care how long it takes, just so I know."

"Sorry."

"Well, that's just goddamn discouraging."

Poor Charles Egan. I must have exasperated him. Maybe he was dying for another drink and just wanted me the hell out of there. He looked like he hadn't slept much. He took a weary step back and closed one eye, as if to measure me—to measure me for what? The tomb of the unknown artist?

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"Don't bullshit me," he half grinned. You'll quit painting if I don't show you? You won't quit. I can tell just looking at you."

Sure, I thought, the son of a bitch is right. So what? I'll keep painting but that's only the half of it—where's the other half if no one sees the work? The power of the art dealer was coming home to me; it seemed awesome. I left feeling a bit more alone, more vulnerable than I had just a dozen minutes earlier.

My future took a promising turn at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery on West 57th Street. There I met John Bernard Myers. He was working with Tibor at that time. He did something none of the others had, and I remain grateful to him. Not that he was going to let me be one of the artists in that gallery. Far from it; he said much of the same I'd been getting all along: you're good, but we can't take on any more artists and so on. What he did do, while I was standing there, was to get on the phone and call Elinor Poindexter: "There's a young artist here. I think he's very good. As you know, Tibor isn't taking on any new artists, and since you're planning to open your own gallery, you must be looking for good new painters." He made a date for Mrs. Poindexter to visit my studio. He told me Mrs. Poindexter had been the money behind the Egan Gallery but that she'd become impatient with Egan's drinking habits.

It turned out that she herself was no advertisement for the Temperance League, which was fine by me. She was a handsome woman with the look and feel of upper-class money in her background. We drank a hell of a lot while she looked at my work. She seemed fluttery, nervous. After all, she didn't know me and the neighborhood was scary. She looked and looked and finally said she didn't understand any of my paintings.

"I'm frightened. I'm afraid to make a mistake. I'll come back in the summer and take another look. I'll decide then."

Dismaying, but there was still hope. The summer was five or six months away. I could do a lot of painting, terrific painting, between now and then. And who knows, she might turn out to be the Bride of Kahnweiler.

I worked like a crazy man. I worked day and night, often days and nights at a time—without sleep. Gallons of coffee kept me awake; the paintings kept me fired up. Between bouts of work I fancied my future with the Bride.

This time she would really see my work. Enraptured, she would fall to her knees. Finally my art would be seen. I, too, would

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be seen. Bishop Berkeley had it right: "To be, is to be perceived"—or something to that effect. I learned there was a Mr. Poindexter, Elinor's husband. Maybe he would be, for me, a loving older brother, or maybe a devoted uncle; I could see the two of us pursuing exotic creatures in Mongolia. One day, far in the future, the Bride and me and Mr. Poindexter—we would journey to Snovsk and find the house where I was born. All in all, a terrific six months until one afternoon on a boiling summer day, Elinor Poindexter returned. To be or not to be, indeed. I was not to be. She looked at everything and this time she was certain. "Now I know it for sure," she said. "I won't risk showing you."

She tried to be kind. She wanted to help. Did I know anyone? Who were the artists I hung out with? I told her I didn't know anyone. Her face lit up. My not knowing anyone had to be the reason my work didn't look quite right. Now she knew how to help me. "You must go to the Cedar Bar! That's where they hang out—Jackson, Bill, Franz, the boys. Go there as often as you can. Get to know the boys. Become part of the scene. That's how it's done. And your paintings will change."

I knew about the Cedar Street Bar. I had long ago decided not to go there—for much the same reasons she was now urging me to.

As things turned out, about five or six years later, Ellie Poindexter did become my dealer. I was with her gallery for seven years. She became dear to me and always will be, but watching her go down the steps that day and out the building, I cursed silently. The letdown of that day stayed with me a long time. I pretty much gave up. I left the flat only to go to the movies along Times Square. In and out, one movie after another; three got me through the night. I drank a lot of booze. I slept in my army overcoat, my legs and feet inside the sleeves of my field jacket. I put newspaper inside my shoes to cover the holes. A dismal enough state, capped as it was by the Bride of Kahnweiler fiasco. There were times in that apartment when I might have gone out the window if I hadn't lived on the second floor.

One day a boyhood friend named Hal Dareff turned up. He had an idea. Why not use the two years I had left on the G.I. Bill by going to New York University. "Get a degree, become a college professor." I could then reclaim my kid, maybe remarry and have more kids, at the least I could live better. The idea that I could become a

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college professor was a laugh. Me? As a kid I was regarded as the family dummy, the moron; my future, they told me, was the Bowery or death in the electric chair. Sometimes both.

Even so, the idea of escaping my lot for two years by going to school and getting the G.I. Bill money was attractive. Incredibly enough, all that Hal Dareff had proposed became real: Master's degree, new wife, reclaimed daughter, college professor. It was a new life. I sat among the professors at faculty meetings that seemed insane and endless and thought of suicide. I drank myself silly.

I became chairman of the art department at a liberal arts college out on Long Island called C. W. Post, and we, my wife, reclaimed kid, and a new baby daughter, were living in a handsome old stone house in Northport. I was pushing thirty-six.

I had but one experience with an art dealer during the time I was taking courses at New York University. To save time and subway fare, I had moved into an attic on Greene Street, a stone's throw from the downtown N.Y.U. campus. I loved going to school. I painted at night. Reginald Pollack, an artist I had met in Paris, brought his brother Lou to my attic. Lou was the director of the Peridot Gallery, a very good gallery. I liked Lou. A slow-speaking, sensitive, meditative type, he definitely had the Kahnweiler stamp about him. His gallery had New Talent shows from time to time. He said something of mine would be featured in his next New Talent show. After he left, I waltzed around the attic, but Lou never put on another New Talent show. A few years later he died.

I grew a thick skin. Maybe it was a defense; a kind of protective device. No one gave a damn—I wouldn't give a damn. It would not matter to me if you did or didn't go for my work. I had nothing to lose. Not that I gave up on my future; like a horse with blinders, I would keep going. I imagined a dedicated handful of collectors, types like the Cone sisters, Gertrude and Leo Stein, Shchukine and Morosov, Barnes, Quinn, etcetera. I imagined Clement Greenberg writing about me in *Partisan Review*.

With a suddenness I had not foreseen, I had become respectable. More to the point, I had a studio and money for art materials. I felt I was painting better than ever. Why not give Kahnweiler another shot?

Back to 57th Street and the galleries on Madison Avenue. Once again the same old thing. Nothing. One day I had an appoint-

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ment with Betty Parsons. She wasn't in. Her secretary looked at a pad. "Gee, I'm sorry. Miss Parson must have forgotten. She's gone for the day."

Not the end of the world, I said to myself as I waited at the elevator.

At that time the Parsons Gallery was on the same floor as Sidney Janis's. The elevator door opened and Sidney Janis stepped out. Maybe I would get lucky. I told him how I happened to be there and said, "If you have a minute, Mr. Janis, would you look at my paintings?"

"I haven't looked at my mail yet," he said and kept going.

On the elevator down, I thought he could have said: "Why don't you make an appointment?"

On the sidewalk I swore I would never put myself in that position again. Never again would I ask an art dealer to look at my work. Terrific! I felt lifted up. Free. I drove home to Northport. In my studio that night, looking around, I said to myself: so what do you do now?

I thought about that a lot. How come I'm always turned down, even when they say I'm good? Is it something in my art? In me? What would convince them? So many years of trying and nothing had worked.

I figured it had to be me. Somehow I was in my own way. Yes, that was it. It wasn't the dealers: they lacked conviction, they couldn't necessarily tell good from bad. They operated on some other level; it would take more than art to convince them. None of this would apply to my Kahnweiler—but where was the elusive son of a bitch? Unconventional measures were called for—but what?

Was there something I could have done—something I could not do? That was it! I could not put my work before an art dealer and say: "Hey! Look at these paintings. This is great art. You have to show my work." No, I could not say such things. I'd rather boil a goat. But if I wasn't talking about myself—if I was talking about someone else . . . ? I had my answer.

What I had arrived at was a crazy answer, bizarre—though it seemed profoundly reasonable at the time. I had tried the straight and usual, the conventional ways. I had a stomach full of sour "No's." I would fight the dealers in my own way and I would win. I hardly thought of anything else. I had to have my one man show: at least one shot at it was all I asked.

I would invent an artist; the more dramatic his history, the bet-

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ter. A kind of ghost artist: no one could ever see him in the flesh but me. I was probably certifiably mad at that time; I hardly recognize myself.

So then: Jevel Demikov, a talented young Soviet artist whose socialist realist canvases had attracted the attention of Joseph Stalin. He became Stalin's protégé. Thanks to Stalin, Demikov had been permitted to spend the year of 1950 in Paris to further refine his skills at the Academie des Beaux Arts. We happened to meet: we became friends. I took him around to the galleries that showed modern art; Demikov was enthralled and seduced. His paintings turned abstract.

Back home in Moscow he painted his pictures of tractors, buxom maidens, stalwart workers, Red Army heroes; at night in secret he made forbidden art. Demikov showed his abstract paintings to some of his fellow artists. Soon there were underground cells of artists making what they took to be Modern Art. Like a rampant cancer the cells spread all over the U.S.S.R. The O.G.P.U sniffed and scowled. They went looking for Demikov, enemy of the people. He fled. Hidden in a barrel, he was put ashore in Brooklyn. He had no one to help him but me. I had to help. The Soviet secret police were on his trail. If they got him, Demikov said, they would kill him on the spot. Stalin, himself, was demanding the head of Demikov. I hid my friend in a cellar. Once a week I drove to Brooklyn and brought him food and drink and paint and canvas. He was painting away like a man obsessed. I could hardly believe what I saw. Here was a breakthrough that would make the New York art scene spit.

My plan developed; there were a couple of offshoots. One involved Alfred Barr, the director of the Museum of Modern Art. I wrote him about the plight of Demikov. Mr. Barr wrote back, saying he was interested and asked for photographs of the work. I sent photographs. He wrote and said he was now very interested and would I please bring some of the paintings to his office, and the artist himself. As things turned out, I didn't need to follow through. When I finally did get a gallery to give me a show I wrote Mr. Barr that Demikov had disappeared, probably murdered. A last-resort plan called for hiring an actor, fluent in Russian. He would be interviewed by *Time* and *Life* Magazine reporters. He would wear a paper bag over his head with holes cut out for his eyes and mouth. Through an interpreter he would tell his story. Demikov's paintings would be reproduced. Maybe something would happen.

I didn't have to use the back-up plan.

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This is what I did: at the college I scheduled an exhibition called *"L'Ecole de Paris Aujourd'hui."* I borrowed paintings for the exhibition from some of the galleries in New York, any one of which would suit my purpose just fine. In the late 1950s, in New York City, it was amazingly easy to arrange such a show. None of these dealers knew me; the college was out of town, new, barely known. As far as I know they took me at my word. I could have walked off with all that treasure. It was a lovely show. And there, cheek by jowl with the stars of Paris, was my Russian. I had an announcement of the exhibition printed, listing all the artists.

When the show ended I drove to the city to return the paintings. My first stop, as it happened, was the Alexander Iolas Gallery. Mr. Iolas was expecting me. I handed him his paintings; I think one was a Mathieu and one a Dubuffet. He asked about the exhibition. I said it had been a beautiful show and would he like a copy of the announcement for his files? Yes, he would.

"Ah," he says, reeling off the list of artists, "Matisse, Picasso, Miró, Léger, Dubuffet, de Stael. . . . " He stops short and looks at me. "Who is this Demikov?"

"Ah," I say, "of course you don't know him. He's unknown in America." I tell Mr. Iolas Demikov's story: how he had been seduced by abstract art, his return to the U.S.S.R., Stalin's tantrum, and the barrel ending up in Brooklyn, and, "At this moment, Mr. Iolas, a great artist is hiding in a cellar in Brooklyn. You must look at his work.

"Well," he says, "I'm sympathetic. I'd like to help. Could you bring some paintings?"

I tell him I have four Demikovs from the exhibition in my Microbus. "I'm on my way to Brooklyn to return them. I'll bring them in."

"Bring them in."

I bring the paintings in and lean them against a wall.

He looks closely at each painting. He looks and looks. I'm standing behind him. Why is he taking so long? What does he see? What is he thinking? I'm prepared for a "no." I'm telling myself: this is just the first stop. There are still other galleries . . . sure. And if they all turn me down? Then what? Then I'll get the masked Russian and *Time* and *Life*. . . . Jesus I'm getting old standing here.

Finally he stands, straightens up, turns around, looks me in the eye, and says: "You're right. He's a genius. We must have a show."

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I'm stunned. Can it be? This slim, dark, olive-skinned Greek dressed in a black, elegantly-cut Italian suit—my Kahnweiler? I want to throw my arms around his neck. I want to kiss him. All I can manage to say is: "Demikov will be ecstatic. Ecstatic." I keep saying it: "Ecstatic. Ecstatic."

Mr. Iolas is businesslike. "To have an exhibit, I will need more paintings."

I tell him Demikov paints day and night. "I'll bring a truckful of paintings. Big ones. Even better than these. You'll see. Masterpieces. I can't wait to tell Demikov. He'll be ecstatic, ecstatic. What a wonderful thing. . . . " I'm going on, out of control.

"When can I meet the artist?"

I'm stopped in my tracks. "Good God," I say, "don't you understand?" I'm talking fast about Stalin and his thugs. "They're out there. They never give up. Demikov won't come out. He won't come out. Impossible. You want to get him killed?"

Mr. Iolas is looking a bit uneasy, a bit goggle-eyed. He's giving me a funny look. "I must meet the artist," he says.

"All you need are the paintings," I say. "I will bring the paintings. I will be the go-between."

"What do you want out of this?" I don't like the edge in his voice.

"Me? Nothing. I'm a professor. I'm not even an artist. I teach art history. You think I want money?" I try a disdainful chuckle, but it gets away from me and comes out sounding like the bray of a donkey.

He's looking at me the way you'd look at someone selling fake Persian rugs. I suggest a post office box in Demikov's name (though how Demikov can use it if he never leaves the cellar, I hope Mr. Iolas won't ask). "If there are any paintings sold, you can send him the money. I," I say solemnly, "am only trying to help my friend, a great artist."

Mr. Iolas has had enough. "No!" he says. "No! I've never dealt with a living artist that I did not know personally. I won't deal with you! Tell your friend I am not political. He has nothing to fear from me. Tell him I will meet him anywhere he chooses—in the middle of the Brooklyn Bridge at midnight, if he wishes—but without our meeting, fine artist though he is, there will be no show."

It's all slipping away. My head feels like a popcorn machine operating at highest speed. What to do? Tell the truth. There's no

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other way. But I can't say it in English. I give a sigh and say, "*Alors, Demikov, c'est moi.*" Mr. Iolas answers with a shake of his shoulders and his palms up, and a sound, something like "Pouuuuf." I think at that moment Mr. Iolas was not sure as to who I was: an escaped Russian or a lunatic American.

About eight months later Mr. Iolas gave me my first New York show.

Coming in

Partisan Review

- **Raymond Aron:** *A Memoir*
- Julia Kristeva on The Enlightenment
- Tsvetan Todorov: *Heroic Narratives of the Warsaw Ghetto*
- Stanislaw Baranczak on Joseph Brodsky
- Lionel Abel: *The Hero of Metatheater*
- William Phillips: *The Function of Criticism Today*
- Edith Kurzweil on Hungarian Psychoanalysis
- David Bar-Illan: *Israeli Letter*
- Nathan Glazer on Life in the Bronx
- Sonya Rudikoff on Virginia Woolf
- Paul Hollander on Fellow Travellers

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Eugène Ionesco

THEATERS OF THE ABSURD

Why is there still theater today? Because it is alive. The people speak; they are not speaking images. We are talking about a theater which a number of us wrote, especially between 1950 and 1965. The difference between theater and cinematic images: text, words, not pure production, not spectacle. The theater most of all is text and not production-spectacle alone. Why does one go to a football game, to a prize fight? To see actual people, to see the blood flow—alas—the punch up close, right here, in close participation. Why do we go to visit temples and are not content to see them on postcards? To be there, to live in the spiritual company of our forefathers.

The theater is alive; one can go to see a play twice; it will be like two plays, each time another way of being, another game. The movie image is stiff, cold. What does the theater serve? What does football serve, unless, when one is English, to kill the Belgians?

"The theater of the absurd" names a certain number of theatrical works whose center of origin and creation was the Paris of the early 1950s. This theater was described as such by the well-known English critic Martin Esslin. Why did he call it "the theater of the absurd"? Maybe because one spoke a great deal of the absurd between 1945 and 1950, and Esslin had to consider that there was a rapport between our theater and thought, theories or obsessions made fashionable by Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Georges Bataille, and a few others. It seemed to him that there was a rapport between this genre of theater and the way these writers saw the postwar world. Maybe he was right. As far as I'm concerned, I have had a certain amount of trouble accepting this definition. But now it has come to be called a certain genre of theater, and that definition applies to theatrical works in the current era. Since the definition and the theater belong to literary history, this has given me a reason to call the theater of the absurd "absurd." I would rather, like Emmanuel Jacquard, have called it "theater of derision." In effect, the

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characters of this theater, of my theater, are neither tragic nor comic but derisory. The characters are cut off from all transcendental and metaphysical roots. They cannot be but psychological puppets, or without psychology, as one used to say. Undoubtedly, they will continue to be symbolic characters, expressions of an era.

I had thought that half of the plays that had been written before us were absurd to the extent that they could be comical, for example, because the comic is absurd. I also thought that the ancestor of that theater, the great ancestor, could be Shakespeare, who has his hero say: "The world is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Perhaps one can say that this theater of the absurd goes back further and that Oedipus too was an absurd character, since what happened to him in effect was absurd. But with a difference: unconsciously, Oedipus broke the laws and was punished for having transgressed them. Nevertheless, there were laws and norms, even if he managed to violate them. In our theater, the characters don't seem to cling to anything, and if I may cite myself, the oldsters of my play "The Chairs" are lost in a world without laws, without rules, without transcendence. That is what I also wanted to show in a cheerful play like *The Bald Soprano*, for example: the characters without metaphysical roots, searching perhaps for a center they have lost, a point of support beyond them. Beckett wrote more coldly, maybe more lucidly, in the same sense.

But there already had been absurd theater that was neither comical nor happy, written in another style. I have the audacity to think that *The Bald Soprano*, *The Lesson*, *The Chairs*, and *Victims of Duty* are the plays that have given a novel impetus to an absurd "new style." The success of my early plays is incontestable. They have pleased the Germans, the English, the Americans, and men of the theater who have followed us with less talent, as much talent, or more talent. And I continue to maintain that the theater of the new absurd soared in the 1950s, more exactly, beginning with *The Bald Soprano* which played in 1950, *The Lesson* which was presented in 1951, *The Chairs* which dates in 1952, and *Victims of Duty* from 1953. With much greater power than was generally realized, Beckett arrived in the theater in 1953 with his unforgettable *Waiting for Godot*. I cannot affirm that what I wrote subsequently illustrates this style of theater. *Exit the King*, for instance, is probably too literary, except in the final scene which, however, is inspired by the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*.

I would also say that the word "absurd" is a bit forced, given

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that one cannot say of a thing that it is absurd without having a model of that which is not absurd. But I could say that the characters of *The Dead* were searching for a sense they didn't find, a law, supreme conduct, for what one cannot call anything other than divinity. For me, the theater of the absurd was also a theater of battle against the bourgeois theater it sometimes parodied and against realist theater. I held and I still hold that reality is not realistic, and it is realist theater, socialist realism, the Brechtian theater that I fought against and criticized. Realism is not reality; I said realism is a school of theater which has a certain way of envisaging the real, just as romanticism and surrealism do. What I disliked in bourgeois theater was that it was preoccupied with futilities: business, economy, politics, adultery, diversion in the Pascalian sense. One could even say the theater of adultery of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century may have come down from Racine, with the enormous difference that adultery in Racine led to death. It was no more than a futile game for many of the post-Racinian writers. Another fault of realism is that it was an ideological theater, thus in some ways a theater of lies, a dishonest theater. It is so not only because one does not know what reality is and because no man of science can say what reality is, but also because the realist writer sullied himself to prove something, to engage the people, the spectators, the readers, in the name of an ideology of which the writer wanted to convince us but which was not legitimate for that reason. All realist theater is a theater of cheating, even, and especially, if the author is sincere. True sincerity comes from further away; it comes from the depths of the irrational, the unconscious. To speak of oneself is more convincing and more truthful than to speak of others, to engage people in an always debatable political cause.

I speak of myself in order to speak of everyone. The true poet does not lie, does not cheat, wants to engage no one, simply because the authentic poet does not lie, does not invent; he is totally different. In effect, imagination comes forth with images, with symbols that come from the depths, and it is for that reason that these images are significant and full of sense. Pirandello also had an ideology, psychological theories that, since the advent of depth psychology, no longer have truth or value: but the characters are alive, and one can always go to see Pirandello because his characters live with passion and live this passion dramatically.

To speak again of myself, and I excuse myself for it, I and some

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of the others among us wanted to show not only the condition of being in love, adulterous, even social. We wanted to make evident to the spectators the existential condition of man even in his integrity, in his totality, in his deepest tragedy, his destiny—that is to say in the conscience of the absurdity of the world. This is history "told by an idiot."

In this way we wanted to serve man's knowledge, if one can use these words, through the most ingrained testimony of our being. I thought that the theater was in some sense useless but that one could live with the useless, that one needs the useless: what use are the vital football games and tennis matches and so many other contests? It is the useless that one cannot do without. But one can do without the so-called useless game of art, of contemplation, of prayer. Yes, art is useless, but its uselessness is indispensable. In the encyclopedias of the new China, the word "contemplation," it seems, has been suppressed. Contemplation is in a sense useless and at the same time essential, indispensable. People who have lost it and who are not astonished by their being, by existence, are spiritually infirm. Could I affirm that in our world art can replace religion? Since I questioned the utility of art, I could ask myself about the utility of the magnificent construction of the antique temples. Constructed to receive the faithful who would come to pray, today they are visited only by tourists, and no longer by believers, since these religions are dead; the best among them appreciate and admire the pure construction of the spirit, since an architectural construction is an idea, a construction of the spirit, an abstract structure.

I still don't know very well what the word "absurd" means unless it is the interrogation of the absurd, and I repeat that those who no longer are astonished that they exist, those who don't ask questions about being, who find that all is normal, natural now that the world is rejoining the supernatural, are infirm. I don't know if one is to feel sorry for them or to rejoice for them. But the wonderment will come; the question of the absurdity of this world cannot fail to be posed even if there is no possible response. All those who live in the immediately useful, in routine, in politics are to be pitied, whereas it is before the incomprehensible that we ought to kneel.

At least one should ask oneself about the existential problems the ecologists have posed. Soon the atmosphere's ozone may be missing. This will, for example, be the fault of the politicians, of the engineers and chemists who construct death engines instead of

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preoccupying themselves with the only important thing: the possible end of this world. But let us try to uplift ourselves at least by thinking about what is rot-proof, about the real, that is to say about the sacred, and about the ritual that expresses the sacred and cannot be found without the creation of great art.

I absolutely don't know whether the theater of the absurd has a future or not, whether the different realist theaters have a future or not. I can probably respond to this question by interrogating my fortune-teller. But those who ask about the vitality of this theater of the absurd are the enemies of the theater of the absurd and the partisans of one sort of political realism or another. There always will be one theater of the absurd or another, other numerous forms of the absurd—unless one were to find, tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, the key to the enigma.

Yet I think that in part all this preceding discourse is superfluous. I wanted to talk about the battles, the polemics we had during that period with certain active and virulent Brechtians, among them Kenneth Tynan. The texts of these polemics are historical. But the ideologies, we all know, are passé. The pure spectacles, the productions, provisionally replace them. Furthermore, the absurd has invaded the real in such a fashion that what one calls "realist reality," the reality of realities and realisms, to us seems as real as the absurd; and the absurd appears to us as reality: let's look around us.

The incontestable Beckett, who came to the theater in 1953, with his admirable *Waiting for Godot*, is not simply an author of the so-called absurd drama because he is as much an absurdist as he is a realist. Beckett has brought us to the edge of the absurd in his drama and in his comedy which have become routine. It has surpassed the limits that go to the absurd and beyond, beyond the reality we now have reached.

Translated from the French by Edith Kurzweil

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Edith Kurzweil

PSYCHOANALYSIS IN VIENNA

Nearly a hundred years ago Freud began to shock his Viennese compatriots by mining his own unconscious in order to generalize to theirs. Last summer in Vienna, the group of psychoanalysts, historians, sociologists, and psychologists who had gathered in Hamburg in 1985, and under the guidance of the enterprising French psychoanalyst Alain de Mijolla founded the International Association for the History of Psychoanalysis, met again in Freud's home. There, surrounded by an exhibition assembled for the occasion and against many (mostly financial) odds, psychoanalysis no longer shocked anyone. For even the average Viennese has accepted the existence of the unconscious, although he has remained anti-Semitic. The assembled psychoanalysts and scholars, however, concentrated on the past, on interpretations of Freud's texts and on reinterpretations in light of new evidence.

The German historian Gerhard Fichtner started out by warning the participants that all historians find the stones suitable for their own theoretical edifices, and that this is a special danger for historians of psychoanalysis—whose stones include, among other things, the unconscious content of Freud's newly released letters and their "place" within the rest of his works. Even though Freud voluntarily destroyed all his papers in 1885, and again in 1908 when he moved to Berggasse 19, and though he lost some involuntarily when he emigrated to London in 1938, we know of around 8,000 existing letters between himself and about 400 persons. Five thousand of these, of which 3,200 have been published, were written by Freud.

At this conference of the International Association for the History of Psychoanalysis (I.A.H.P.), the 1,800 "missing" letters were as central in the discussions as the ones that have been released by the Freud Archives—located primarily at the Library of Congress, but also in London among Anna Freud's private papers and with some of Freud's correspondents. Would their release interfere with the secrecy that Freud as physician was sworn to observe? Might one or another of Freud's patients have descendants who would suffer from disclosure? Or, as Kurt Eissler, the former head of the Freud Archives, and his successor Harold Blum have been accused, are they being overly protective of Freud? If so, curiosity

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mounts. What must the foremost genius of our century be protected from? Objectively, since neither misinterpretations nor deprecations of his character can diminish Freud's stature, we must conclude that the battles over reinterpretations are to determine which road to the unconscious is to prevail now. (As an historian, Fichtner is as much out of the fray as I—as a sociologist—am.) Fichtner noted that even minutiae about Freud's handwriting, his moves to and from Gothic and Latin script, his scribbled notes in pencil, his use of dialect, of Yiddish and English expressions in otherwise excellent German have led to misreadings—some of these due to the terminology and perceptions of his time, others to garbled and badly annotated translations, and to abbreviations.

Among those addressing this issue was Patricia Touton-Victor of the University of Cambridge. She was surprised that she could not find the first translations of Freud into French in the archives of French publishers; that these were in obscure journals; and that the corpus started to appear only in 1920. Touton-Victor reminded us that his ideas were rejected; that those of Janet were preferred; and that Regis and Hesnard, who introduced "Psychoanalysis of Neuroses and Psychoses" in 1914, complained that "its language is difficult to translate because it unfortunately leans on the taste of German philosophy for the heterogeneity of its vocabulary." Freud, on the other hand, was found to prefer English and even Spanish to French. He allegedly overcame his reluctance almost exclusively through the close friendship he established with the Princess, Marie Bonaparte. Because she translated his works, however belatedly, the language of psychoanalysis was accepted in France. (Many Viennese have yet to overcome *their* chauvinism.)

Currently, the focus on language and the juxtapositions of the same words over time, and of words that might have been uttered or written by Freud but weren't, is a thread that more or less ran through all the contributions by the French—historians and psychoanalysts alike. Madelaine and Henri Valmorel, the least involved among them in this "linguistic psychoanalysis," demonstrated that Freud drew on German romanticism and on a number of other currents as well—the Enlightenment, *Sturm und Drang,* Goethe's and Schiller's classicism, and his "beloved German language." The Valmorels traced the genealogy of the word drive (*Trieb*) in its various contexts and concluded that Freud came to no longer glorify the biological implications of *Trieb* but opposed it to the Enlightenment,

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and thus rendered romanticism scientific. The American psychoanalyst Darius Ornston approached romanticism from *his* perspective by arguing that his English translators and followers underestimated the influence of romantic medicine on Freud—a point the French have been making for some time.

Another Frenchman, Bernard Sigg, associated to the context of the two postcards Freud sent to his wife Martha from Rome in August 1901—to what he notes about Michelangelo's *Moses* and what he omits, such as the figure of Julius II. By connecting this omission to Jones's *misunderstanding* of Freud's revelation when he first saw the *Moses,* and to Lacan's "famous *lapsus* of the *nom-du-père,*" to the dead father, the death of his younger brother Julius, and to Freud's concept of the death instinct, he implicitly elevated theories on the language of psychoanalysis over those emanating from clinical experience.

Sigg's compatriot, Renato Mezan, took off from yet another of Freud's words, "philistine" (in his letter to Wilhelm Fliess of September 9, 1897). Why did Freud not only employ this word in its customary sense but also yet add a reference to the biblical Philistines? Because we are faced with "an as yet unrecognized *lapsus* by Freud." Going back to the Bible, to the effect of the Philistines' invasion in the ninth century B.C. on the Israeli tribe, Mezan then elaborated on Freud's familiarity with the entire Phillipsohn Bible his father had given him for his seventeenth birthday. In it, argues Mezan rather convincingly, he found the themes of incest, of filial aggressivity, infantile hate of the father, and tenderness towards heroes. He got more out of this Bible than anyone else, I must add.

On balance, the Anglo-Saxons' historical investigations focused on interpreting Freud's concepts more directly and theoretically. For instance, Jacques Szaluta, a historian from New York, postulated that biblical figures provided Freud with a number of ego ideals—although he also had political, literary, philosophical, and medical ones. And Harold Blum, to "balance" the emphasis (mostly emanating from France) on the influence of Jakob Freud on his son Sigmund, focused on the fact that Freud became the father of six children during the period of his self-analysis between October 1887 and December 1895, and that there are explicit references in the Fliess letters to indicate that "Martha's pregnancies reactivated primal-scene trauma and unconscious fantasies of incest, castration, abortion, and infanticide." Moreover, Blum maintains that Freud's

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unconscious representation of Fliess changed over the course of the self-analysis; that he achieved a "creative resolution" after he went through what so far has been called his "creative illness," and that "Freud's self-analytic regression was regression in the service of the ego, a creative regression comparable to maternal regression in the service of infant care." All of these points reinforce the theories of "American ego psychology."

The I.A.H.P. was created in order to bridge the differences among "national" approaches to psychoanalysis, to overcome them through exposure. Therefore, psychoanalytic historians also have been eagerly exploring the contributions by "local" and less prominent figures. Anna Maria Accerboni, for instance, who organized a congress in 1985 that established Edoardo Weiss's (and Italy's) location within the movement, here elaborated on Weiss's difficult relationship to his "fathers"—Freud, Paul Federn, and his own. Ignazio Weiss's death, Accerboni shows, temporarily shook Weiss's equilibrium but initiated new insights which gradually distanced him from Freud and brought him closer to Federn. By revealing that Federn couldn't separate himself from Freud any more than Weiss had been able to detach himself from Federn, Weiss's biographer explained that Federn believed that individuals want to live in a society with a father whom they can love—because he did.

Paul Federn's son, Ernest Federn, a psychoanalyst, agreed that his father was an "unremitting admirer" of Freud, and he emphasized (with the help of unpublished documents) that he was the only one of Freud's disciples to have remained close to him, personally and professionally, for thirty-five years. This point, of course, is a slap at those who have argued that Freud distanced himself from *all* his disciples. That Paul Federn's importance has been underplayed is yet another slap at American ego psychologists who considered him more or less deviant and outside their orbit.

Livia Nemes, who at the 1987 Paris meeting of the I.A.H.P. commented on the ups and downs of psychoanalysis in Hungary in the 1940s, this time (with Patrizia Giampieri) recalled a "forgotten" speech Freud gave late in 1918 at Budapest University which led its medical students to expect the inclusion of psychoanalysis in their curriculum. As the transcript of the speech underwent translations and retranslations, this fact apparently was omitted, but Nemes and Giampieri found a petition to the Minister of Education—which was rejected. As to the transcript itself, Nemes noted, no original has

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ever been found. Did Ferenczi lose it, or, as some have argued, was Freud's speech never written down? It must have existed, holds Nemes, or Ferenzci could not have informed Freud that he had "taken the liberty to insert a small sentence." Nemes reconstructed all the details before concluding that this speech must have been the joint work of Freud and Ferenczi. Thereby, the reputation of Hungarian psychoanalysis also is being reclaimed.

Hans Lobner, a young Viennese psychoanalyst, discusses the Minutes of February 24, 1909—within them a talk by Freud, "The Genesis of Fetishism"—which only recently were rediscovered. At that time, Lobner notes, Freud already had "previewed" some of his later contributions on fixations, voyeurism, clothes fetishism, foot and shoe fetishism. Here, Freud also contrasted pathological fetishism with the normal clothes fetishism of all women: "Dress for them plays an inexplicable role. It deals once more with repression of the act of being-seen, this time only in the passive drive (*Trieb*) which was repressed by clothes so that clothes are being elevated to a fetish" [my translation]. Lobner, linking notions of fetishism to the ethnologists' search for amulets, relics, mummies, and cultural objects, finds analogies between their own searches and those of psychoanalysts for the unique secret of each patient. Feminists, on the other hand, might forget the historical and theoretical context and link Freud's notion of women's "normal" fetishism to male chauvinism.

The discoveries of some lost documents and the gradual release of others by the guardians of the Freud Archives stimulated some participants at this conference, for instance, to write a biographical sketch of Freud's boyhood friend Herbert Silberer; to review the "erotic triangle"—Freud, Kraus, Wittels—within the Vienna Circle; and to investigate why and under what circumstances Freud acquired the approximately 1,900 objects (of mixed quality) in his collection of antiques. Next to this "addiction," documented another contributor, Freud's "travel addiction," induced him to undertake about one hundred major trips and to regret that after his first gum operation in 1923 he no longer could travel.

Inevitably, a paper was given about Freud, Thomas Mann, and Romain Rolland, speculating whether Freud could have conceptualized the death instinct if he had not lived through the First World War, and concluding that "aggressive impulses and personal conflicts—even of the most eminent men—are intimately linked to

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political events." Freud's attitude to his Jewishness, once more, was on the agenda, but this time by the Viennese Kenneth Thau—who focused on the pervasive anti-Semitism among the Viennese medical faculty and its effect on Arthur Schnitzler, Hugo v. Hoffmansthal, and Theodor Herzl as well as on Freud. Citing a number of Freud's contradictory views of himself as a Jew, Thau, by going through the major literature of the turn of the century, implicitly equated the results of anti-Semitism in Vienna (linked to its intellectuals' political non-involvement) to the current "nuclear danger." Unfortunately, this leap from the past to the present detracted from an otherwise excellent account, bowing as so many academics do to the idea that any paper worth its salt must end with a lesson for the future.

The psychoanalyst Harald Leupold-Löwenthal [whose documentation of the emigration of Freud's family follows this article] is one of the few German-speaking analysts not to reduce the fact that even if the perpetrators of the Holocaust and all men at war or planning war are giving vent to their aggressive and self-destructive drives, historical conditions cannot be equated. This theme was addressed more thoroughly at the meeting in Paris. Yet similarly here, during the discussions, one person or another argued that Freud, along with the majority of Jews, had not paid enough heed to the anti-Semitism around him; that they all had been prisoners of their assimilationism; that they could have left if only they had wanted to. But as Leupold-Löwenthal demonstrates with the help of previously unavailable documents, the fate of Freud's relatives, the "legalized" expropriation of Jewish property, which preceded by a few years the systematic extermination of the Jews, was organized by the state, executed by eager bureaucrats—and unstoppable.

Leupold-Löwenthal's chronicle of the fate of Freud's sisters, as we know, is an example of what the Nazis did to all old people. Thus it was distressing to hear one of the participants argue that Anna Freud could have saved her four old aunts if only she had done for them what she did for so many others, if only she had pushed Jones to help them as she had to help her favorite colleagues and students get out. It is true that Jones was instrumental in saving most of the Viennese analysts who, in comparison to other Viennese Jews in 1938, thus appeared "privileged." But does the fact that neither Freud nor Anna Freud foresaw the *Anschluss,* or that Anna Freud, aware of the conflicting transferences, friendships and competition among the would-be emigrants, did not want her role as Jones's ad-

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visor made public, really demonstrate repressed ill will (*Verdrängung*)? Is it possible that her "accuser" was unduly biased, because by (unconsciously?) denigrating her character he was elevating Melanie Klein's? For it seems to be a large leap to suggest from the contents of one letter written in 1939 that the old aunts were not leaving Vienna because of Freud's early displeasure at being displaced by these younger siblings. If so, then why did Freud see to it that they would be taken care of in their old age, both before the *Anschluss* and afterward?

Leupold-Löwenthal's careful documentation, I believe, should lay such foolish notions to rest—through his detailed chronicle of events. It demonstrates, among other things, that every day the Nazi machinery "improved" on itself, and followed up each cruel edict with a yet crueler one.

At this conference the history of psychoanalysis was discussed as part of Austrian history. As I.A.H.P. President Alain de Mijolla so aptly stated in his introduction: "The history of the past cannot be dissociated from that of the present. Psychoanalysis is inextricably mixed up with the events that characterize the twentieth century . . . both on the individual and the sociopolitical level." He suggested as well that the participants should employ and combine the rigorous methods of historians with those of prudent psychoanalysts. Some did and others didn't. And in their spare time, they ate Sacher torte with Schlagobers. On these occasions, they came face to face with the run-of-the-mill Austrians and with their anti-Semitism, which under the surface and in spite of many exceptions remains as virulent as it was in 1938.

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Harald Leupold-Löwenthal

THE EMIGRATION OF FREUD'S FAMILY

The fate of Sigmund Freud, his family, his office, the Vienna Psychoanalytic Association, the publishing house, and the clinic in 1938 are only partly documented. Research during the last few years, by Regine Lockot, Karen Brecht, Volker Friedrich has been useful, but most of our information comes from the personal reports by friends—some of them complementary and others contradictory. Two years ago, however, the lawyer Martin Binder turned over to the Freud Archives the documents about the efforts at restitution of Harry Freud's and his descendants' assets. Among the contents of more than thirty file boxes we discovered parts of Alfred Indra's files—the lawyer who represented Freud in 1938 and his heirs in 1945—and of those by Erich Führer, the commissar the Nazis had appointed for Alexander and Harry Freud and who managed the assets of Freud's four sisters. These documents enable us to understand at least some of the terrible events in terms of dates and numbers.

The documents of March 1938 are incomplete, as Alfred Indra wrote to Martin Freud on November 17, 1961 (he begins with one of his characteristic sentences: "You know that I am always ready to serve the Freud family in whatever capacity."): "My files were saved, even if parts are missing, since at first the S.S. and then the Russians took an interest in my affairs."

Indra, together with Anton Sauerwald, tried to make life for the Freuds as easy as possible. On May 20, 1938, he tried to get Freud excused from paying the *Reichsfluchtsteuer*. His request states:

> On Dec. 31, 1937, Dr. Freud declared assets of AS 166.000*
> Upon liquidating the assets of the various psychoanalytic enterprises the state police [Gestapo] decided in April 1938 that the psychoanalytic corporation be dissolved; and that its earnings be liquidated and its books destroyed.
> On May 5, 1939, Professor Dr. Freud took responsibility for

*In current Austrian shillings this should be multiplied by forty. To arrive at the approximate buying power of this shilling in current U.S. dollars, this should be multiplied by three.

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> the debts of the Association—by turning his *Wertpapiere* and moneys over to the commissar. Since the debts which amounted to AS 110.000 were not covered, the Princess Maria von Griechenland and Denmark, represented by the same lawyer, guaranteed the difference with her Austrian capital.
>
> 14,000 Dutch Gulden were not included in this agreement, which will be used if necessary, but at the moment it is thought, with the agreement of the *Devisenstellung,* that the Freud family may keep it outside Austria.
>
> In view of the fact that the *Reichspolizei* and other authorities already dispose over Professor Freud's inland moneys, we request that the *Reichsfluchtsteuer* be cancelled.

The request was denied. On June 4, 1938 RM 31.329 were to be paid for *Reichsfluchtsteuer.* The International Psychoanalytische Verlag had been in financial trouble since 1931. After Hitler's takeover its situation was untenable since the publishing house depended upon German book sales. In March 1936 the 7,679 books of the German distributor had been confiscated, though returned in July. But the distributor no longer wanted to take this risk. Therefore, in 1937 Martin Freud considered that they cease printing not only psychoanalytic works but others as well: without German sales the publishing house had no future.

This question was settled on March 16, 1938 with the takeover by Commissar Sauerwald. In March 1938—illegally—thousands of such commissars were appointed, anticipating the intent expressed in Berlin at the beginning of 1938, to "systematically de-Judaize the economy." According to the "Referat III Jd" in the Reichsministry for the Economy, "Jews were to give up whatever in their function as commerce- and money-parasites they had taken from the German people."

The law ordering all Jews to register their assets (by June 30, 1938 and extended to July 31, 1938) was passed only on April 26, 1938. The up to then "exemplary" taking of Jewish assets in Austria and the control of nearly all Jewish enterprises through commissars had strong repercussions in the "Old Reich." For five years the bureaucrats in the "Old Reich" had been hesitant to take such steps without legal bases—which in Vienna took only a few months. Not without pride, the first issue of "The German Civil Servant, Organ of the Regional Direction of the National Socialist Civil Servants of Austria," stated: "Thanks to the existence of the Illegal NS-bureau-

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cracy it was already possible the day after the takeover to fill the most important positions with National Socialists. Immediately, during the night of March 11th, the deputy to the head of the bureaucrats was called to the commissar-mayor in order to discuss and put through the first ordinances." The same was true for all other groups.

Sauerwald was appointed by the *Staatskommissar of Private Enterprises,* in line with Par. 1, #1 of the "Law of April 13, 1938 regulating the duties of commissars and commissary supervisors." At the suggestion of the head of the German-Austrian medical association and over the objections of Sauerwald, Ernest Jones, Müller-Braunschweig, and Marie Bonaparte, the so-called psychoanalytic "enterprises" were to be liquidated.

In a letter from Professor Matthias Heinrich Göring (Göring's brother-in-law and after 1936 head of German psychotherapy) to the non-Jewish Viennese psychoanalyst August Aichhorn, there is a handwritten comment: "I am primarily interested in an *Ausgleich* of the different (psychoanalytic) directions in the service of a German psychotherapy; it can neither be based on something Jewish (Freud and Adler) nor on something Eastern (Jung); it must have its own stamp (*eigenartig*)."

By the law of August 25, 1938 the commissarship for *Vereine, Organisationen und Verbände* was dissolved and the remaining funds of the W.P.V., about AS 800.000 were confiscated. Its facilities were turned over to the Institut for Orientalism of the University of Vienna. At the planned liquidation of the publishing house a loan of AS 14.214 by the W.P.V. already had been written off, along with a loan by the International Psychoanalytic Association of AS 38.038. On May 20, 1938, as an addenda to the list of Freud's assets Indra states:

> The International Psychoanalytic publishing house was losing money for years. The losses were made up every year with foreign funds. An evaluation of assets is impossible, a balance sheet was no longer kept on Dec. 31,1937 because the *Staatspolizei* confiscated the books, halted all activities and noted a loss of AS 110.000. The taxpayer therefore turned over his entire assets (see Appendix A) to the lawyer for liquidation, Dr. Hans Mann.

Dr. Mann's request was denied and Sauerwald was appointed as liquidator. (The balance sheet included author's payments of AS

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97.359 for Freud and of AS 138.000 for Anna Freud. Appendix D contains the following statement: "The taxpayer owns a collection of Egyptian and Roman antiques which were evaluated at AS 20.000 to 30.000. To be on the safe side it is being evaluated on May 21, 1938 by an expert. Should this collection, against our expectations, be subject to *Reichsfluchtsteuer* I will notify the authorities." (Freud comments on it in his "short chronicle" that the evaluation seemed to have been successful, and was rather low.)

In 1962 it was discovered that on April 11, 1939 RM 35.300 were paid to the German *Golddiskontbank*; and on January 30, 1939 RM 4.963. Dr. Indra explains in 1962 that his files contain no reference to *Abgaben* to the *Golddiskontbank*. Yet he notes:

> Prof. Sigmund Freud was most interested that his complete collection of antiques be exported to England. With the influence of the Princess Georg of Greece he received permission. . . . The collection was transferred to England. In contrast, the valuable and in part irreplaceable works which belonged to the library of the psychoanalytic publishing house were not released, because they were not part of Prof. Freud's private belongings. Over time these disappeared; some the Princess of Greece deposited in the Greek embassy. Furthermore, the *Reichsbehörden,* including the secret police, then were eager to 'treat decently' an international figure like Prof. Freud. . . . He did publish an essay on the question of Moses as an Egyptian, part of which Prof. Freud read to my wife and me while waiting to receive his permit to leave.

(Other correspondence corroborates that the Nazis took Freud's international reputation into consideration and dealt with him "softly.")

Freud's brother Alexander, with the help of the NS lawyer Erich Führer, received permission to emigrate. On May 10, 1938 Alexander Freud turned over his holdings of RM 172.024 to be managed by Führer "as guarantee of my orderly (*ordnungsgemäss*) return to Vienna." The business, which had a large reputation, dealt with the printing of tariffs and regulations by organs of transport, the revision of customs documents, information about matters concerning transportation, and an office for transport-related complaints. After many negotiations which brought Führer even to London (he stayed at the Ritz) the firm was sold for a lifetime annuity of 1,500 Swiss francs. These monies, however, were put into a closed

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account, since in the meantime the German authorities had confiscated Alexander Freud's assets "because an employee had tried to get Harry Freud's collection of stamps out of Germany." After this confiscation (on August 30, 1938) Führer travelled to Lugano and, claiming to act on orders of the Gestapo, got the Alexander Freud family to give him at least a part of the family jewels by promising that this would influence the authorities to consider remanding the confiscation of the business.

Apparently Führer was one of the "German keepers of law who are not just representatives of the client but act as *Treuhänder* of the German people." His altruism, however, appeared to be self-enriching. In September 1938, an article in the German *Pariser Tageszeitung* notes that "lawyers make careers":

> Among the party members who are reaping in the money and who want nothing to do with *Gemeinnutz* is also the lawyer Erich Führer who was elected vice-president of the Legal Association. As soon as his election became public, the clients, interventionists and business opportunists flocked to him. He moved his offices. . . . Already in the first week after the taking of Austria he drove his own, large car with a uniformed chauffeur.

In 1962, Indra states: "In the old files of Erich Führer I found the copy of a receipt that is somewhat comical. Führer, with the Freud's agreement . . . brought jewelry and silverware back from Switzerland. . . . Later, in line with par. #14 of the law on Jewish fortunes, he had one of his employees deliver at least 20,000 grams of silver to the Dorotheum. The receipt I found does not mention the name Freud, but that of Dr. Erich ISRAEL Führer." Clearly, Führer did not hesitate to be besmirched as a Jew for financial gain. From the confiscated holdings of Alexander and Harry Freud the various taxes were being paid (RM 46.195 and 67.906 in April 1939). By then Alexander Freud depended on handouts from family and friends.

As we know, Sigmund Freud was able to leave Vienna on June 3, 1938. He had deposited enough money with Dr. Indra to pay various bills for his office, dues to the medical association, etcetera. And he had legally terminated his lease, for reasons of "emigration." Although there were other complications about the transport of his furniture, it did arrive in London on August 15, 1938, but not

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without another attempt by the Nazis to have him give up his remaining assets, 14,000 Dutch guilders.

But Freud had yet another fear. On November 12, 1938, he wrote to Marie Bonaparte: "The most recent horrible events in Germany intensify the problem of what is to happen to the old ladies between seventy-five and eighty. It is beyond our means to support them in England. The money we left them when we departed, about AS 160.000, is probably already confiscated, will certainly be lost, once they leave. We are thinking of a stay at the French Riviera, Nice or thereabouts. Will this be possible?"

It was not possible, Freud's four sisters, Rosa Graf, Maria (Mitzi) Freud, Adolfine (Dolfi) Freud and Pauline Winternitz could not leave Vienna due to their ages and states of health. Later efforts, at least for Rosa Graf and Pauline Winternitz, came to naught, in part due to the inability to pay what the Nazi authorities demanded.

In the beginning of the 1930s Sigmund Freud, together with his brother Alexander and his sister Anna Freud who lived in the United States, set up a small fund whose income was to insure the financial security of the sisters. From the AS 160.000, they had to pay "tax arrears" for ten years, advance taxes, the so-called JUVA (twenty-five percent of all assets belonging to Jews, the "guilt payments" imposed after the *Reichskristallnacht*). Thus the assets of the four old ladies—who had to move together into Alexander Freud's former apartment—melted away. Their disposable monies were put into a closed account whose use was determined by their *Vermögensverwalter*—the lawyer Erich Führer.

Führer apparently did all he could to help Freud's sisters. In March 1940 the available funds were exhausted. On March 26, 1939 Anna Freud had written to Paul Federn: "We will have to do something to get the aunts out of Vienna. . . . In Vienna, under the guise of tax penalties their money has been almost totally taken away, they can't last longer than a few weeks." Harry Freud alerted Indra who got in touch with Führer. Sauerwald, who also had tried to help the sisters, was unreachable; he was in the army.

On July 20, 1940, Indra sent Harry Freud the following telegram to New York: "Aunts will be destitute by August, all valuables gone, aid is urgently needed." A week later Harry Freud answered: "Trying my best for aunts increase 120 dollars per month impossible." The payments to the old ladies which at first were about RM 250 per person went down to RM 200, then to RM 175 and in

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November 1941 to RM 51.67. There is a letter of January 15, 1941 to Dr. Führer:

> Dear Doctor: Extreme need forces us in spite of your rejecting disposition (*ablehenende Haltung*) on the question of our apartment to request your help. After having to take two couples into our apartment three months ago we have been assigned another eight persons, and we four sisters are limited to *one* room, to serve as bed- and livingroom. As you know, we are somewhat sickly, often bedridden persons, and the proper ventilation and cleaning is thus impossible without danger to health, as well as the accommodation of the things essential to us. The most simple commandment of *humanity* speaks against such a limitation [*Zwang*] and we cannot believe that you will accept this order without feeling for us and will refuse us your help. That is why we appeal to you dear doctor, as our representative, with the humble plea to interfere with the *Referenten der Judenumsiedlung des Wohnungamtes für den 1. Bezirk* to assign us an additional four rather than eight persons. In certainty that you will listen to our desperate call for help, we are, Sincerely, Marie Freud, Adolfine Freud, Pauline Winternitz.

On the following day the sisters wrote that this intervention no longer would be pertinent, eight persons had already moved in.

On March 18, 1942 "Maria Sara Freud" received a letter from her lawyer: "I have received a notification from the finance office, Wien Ost, that you are RM 22. in arrears and they are trying to have me pay. Lack of money does not allow me to lay out this sum. Therefore it is necessary that you immediately, within the next few days, go to the above named finance office and speak with the arbitrator about your financial situation." The nonpayment of such sums could have prevented the emigration of Rosa Graf and Pauline Winternitz.

On June 29, 1942 Marie Freud, Adolfine Freud and Paula Winternitz were brought to Theresienstadt. Rosa Graf followed on the transport of August 28, 1942. According to the records, Adolfine Freud died of "inner bleeding" on February 5, 1943 (most likely of a syndrome due to hunger). Marie Freud and Pauline Winternitz were sent to the extermination camp Maly Trostinec on September 23, 1942. The record shows a question-mark as to the fate of Rosa Graf. However, she must have been sent to Treblinka between October 5th and 10th, 1942.

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In the protocol of the trial against major war criminals in Nuremberg in 1946, in Volume VIII, page 360, of February 27, 1946, we find:

> SUPREME JUSTICE SMIRNOW: Tell me, Mr. Witness, is the name Kurt Franz familiar to you?
> RAJZMAN: He was the deputy commander of the camp . . . the biggest murderer. Kurt Franz was named Obersturmführer because he announced in January 1943 that one million Jews had been killed in Treblinka.
> SUPREME JUSTICE SMIRNOW: I beg you Mr. Witness, to tell us how Kurt Franz killed the woman who said she was Sigmund Freud's sister. Do you remember?
> RAJZMAN: This is how it was: The train arrived from Vienna. I stood on the station platform as people were led off the train. An older woman approached Kurt Franz, pulled out a document and said she was Sigmund Freud's sister. She begged that she be used for light office work. Kurt Franz carefully looked at the document and said that there must be a mistake, led her to the timetable and said that in two hours a train would be returning to Vienna. She was to leave all her valuables and documents there, go to the bath house, and after her bath her documents and her ticket to Vienna would be at her disposal. Naturally the woman went into the bathhouse, from which she never returned.

Translated from the German by Edith Kurzweil

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Ronald Radosh and Michael Harrington

AN EXCHANGE

No one can fail to admire Michael Harrington's personal courage, the strength of his commitment to the fight for social justice, and, against many odds, the energy he has expended in pursuing his lifelong devotion to building a democratic socialist movement in America. Portraying himself as a long-distance runner who moves towards a set goal without any assurance that he will be able to reach it, Harrington sets out to recall major political episodes in his life during the past twenty years. He recounts his political choices in his usual lucid and compelling style. As readers of *Partisan Review* undoubtedly know, his autobiography appears after he has confronted a grave illness. Harrington has set out to produce a series of books that are meant to be a summation as well as a legacy for his followers.

The recent publication of his book, *The Long-Distance Runner: An Autobiography* (Henry Holt and Co.), has merited interviews on *The CBS Morning News, The MacNeil-Lehrer Report,* and editorials of praise in both *The New York Times* and *The New Republic. Newsweek* chimed in with a full-page profile, proclaiming that Harrington is both "a staunch anticommunist and committed patriot, [who] has strongly resisted the utopian and totalitarian strains that inevitably surface in a movement, like socialism, dedicated to transforming society." Others, such as *Village Voice* writer Paul Berman, have given uncritical accolades to Harrington, using the occasion to fortify one's faith in the old bromides. Strangely, since Harrington espouses a political ideology that is still that of a small minority in the United States, few of the reviewers or discussants have had much of anything critical to say about what he has written.

While Harrington does take up questions directly unrelated to politics—such as teaching, publishing and book reviewing, and the reasons for his move to the suburbs—his book is essentially a compendium of his political activities in the two organizations he has headed since the mid-1970s, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, and its successor, Democratic Socialists of America. (For the bulk of the years touched upon by Harrington in his book, I was an active member of both of these organizations. By 1984, I had

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quietly let my membership lapse in Democratic Socialists of America, for reasons that will become clear in this essay.)

Harrington's problem is that he has reached the point in political life he has long feared. He himself complains that he runs the risk of being seen as "the charming representative of an idea whose time had long since gone," or like his friend Norman Thomas, someone who has been turned into "a kind of Leftist icon by established power . . . a socialist who threatened no one and nothing . . . who could be revered on ceremonial occasions and cited to prove that the country was genuinely democratic." Ironically, even those who value his fight for meaningful reforms, like Senator Edward Kennedy, honored him by saying that while some called Harrington's politics socialism, he preferred to call it the "Sermon on the Mount." In his book, Harrington takes off after a conservative senator who attacked his plea for a new fight against poverty by red-baiting him. But one must question whether the kind of praise given him by his supporters is useful, since the essence of their praise is that Harrington has worked for liberal reform on the basis of religious moralism and that his socialism is hardly relevant.

This has certainly not been Harrington's intent. To put his politics into perspective, one has to go the famous debate between Reinhold Niebuhr and Norman Thomas in the thirties and forties. Thomas, insisting on the possibility of "socialism in our time," eschewed those former comrades who had deserted his Party's ranks for the Democrats, and who voted consistently for Roosevelt and supported the New Deal. To them, Niebuhr argued that politics was "the act of choosing among possible alternatives," and hence he insisted that those favoring fundamental change had to work within the Democratic Party to help move it in a progressive direction.

What Harrington did was to combine Thomas's leftist stance with Niebuhr's political strategy, pushing a leftist agenda *within* the ranks of the Democratic Party, a form of Browderism without the Comintern. Harrington has consistently given his support to the chosen candidate of the Democratic Party as the lesser evil, even while his own program or candidate was defeated, as when that candidate was Hubert Humphrey in 1968 or Jimmy Carter in 1980. Seeking a "progressive majority coalition" for the seventies and eighties, Harrington defined his goal as trying to unite three diverse constituencies: middle-class antiwar forces that had supported the McGovern campaign; blue-collar workers led by what he calls the

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hawkish A.F.L.-C.I.O. leadership; and working-class "rednecks" who leaned towards George Wallace's form of populism. Diverse as they were on social and political issues, Harrington believed they could be united by concentrating on economic issues such as health insurance and full employment, all of which would push American politics towards the left. His radical agenda, then, was to be waged within the Democratic Party, rather than outside its ranks where only left sectarians dwelled.

The hidden theme in Harrington's book appears in a brief but revealing notation. At the start of the seventies, he writes, he and his comrades were "very much in sync with the liberal/labor forces on our right flank," while those to the left of him considered Harrington to be a sellout. By the 1980s, this no longer was true. As Harrington's book appeared, he was supporting and writing speeches for Jesse Jackson, and authoring apologias for a candidate whose own opportunism, uncritical third-worldism and anti-Semitism used to make up the very kind of left-wing politics Harrington rejected.

Why did Harrington move in such a direction? The key, I think, is to be found in his statement that he sought to build a new movement that would "become the multi-tendency rallying point of the entire anticapitalist Left," that would avoid "historic differences" while moving towards unity on behalf of immediate tasks. In practice, such a perspective meant seeking an opening to the avowed antidemocratic left—including fellow travellers who may have broken with the old pro-Moscow Communist Party, but whose intellectual orbit and political practice had not strayed beyond the point of their origin. Thus Harrington, who had rejected marching with Communists in peace marches of the sixties, now sought to have his old enemies join him in his new organization.

What one can find in Harrington's book is how that kind of intellectual transformation occurred, although it is usually concealed by questionable comparisons. Thus Harrington sullies the reputation of A. Philip Randolph when he writes that Jackson was trying to "build a Populist, multi-racial coalition on the Randolph model." Yet Randolph, unlike Jackson, would not have hesitated to criticize black anti-Semitism, nor would he have endorsed as allies the varied left-wing dictatorships favored by Jackson.

What happened since the 1970s to put him out of sync with the labor/liberal forces? Indeed, in the late sixties and seventies Harrington was actually hardly in sync with them. As Seymour Martin

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Lipset pointed out in an important piece on the concept of neoconservatism,* in that epoch Harrington already had labeled his liberal and socialist opponents as neoconservatives, in order to isolate old hard-line anti-Stalinists who were still New Dealers, but who "remained strong in their opposition to the Communists and continued to support the war in Vietnam." These members of the liberal community were read out of its ranks by Harrington, whose terminology was meant to show those to his political left—New Left students in particular—that "self-described Left social-democrats like himself and Irving Howe" were not nonradicals, "that there was a difference between them and right-wing hawkish social democrats." Actually, however, as Harrington is forced to acknowledge, men like Hubert Humphrey, Pat Moynihan, George Meany, and Bayard Rustin all were supporting welfare planning, statist and New Deal policies, and were part of what Harrington once termed the "invisible social democracy" inherent in mainstream trade unionism.

Harrington, however, at various points in his book, cannot refrain from taking potshots at his former comrades, who created their own social democratic group, Social Democrats U.S.A. Harrington is inaccurate in his description of the Social Democrats' origins. His text makes it appear that after the split over support of George McGovern, the "pro-war" right-wing opponents formed the Social Democrats, while he and his supporters formed the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee. Actually, Harrington split from the already formed Social Democrats group. And contrary to his assertion, the group—apart from a few of its members—*did not* support the war in Vietnam. It is on record as giving its support to the Negotiations Now movement that sought to end the war. Indeed, Harrington's attack on the Social Democrats as "pro-war" is comparable to that made against him in the early sixties by New Left militants who sought to undermine his authority by condemning him for supporting the war.

Ever anxious to prove to his New Left comrades that he and Howe "were not the staid, Cold War social democrats they imagined," Harrington favored a push to the left. At one point he sarcastically rejects the charge that he is politically motivated by "hostility to the Social Democrats." Yet, he continually singles them

*"Neoconservatism: Myth and Reality," *Society*, July/August 1988, pp. 29–37.

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out for perfidy, for becoming "out and out Reaganites," and for making their way "into the corridors of American power under a Right-wing Republican administration." Here, Harrington is aiming at Carl Gershman, who currently chairs the National Endowment for Democracy, and whom Harrington describes as a "trusted Cold Warrior." The left-wing magazine *The Nation* has attacked the National Endowment for Democracy for financing the Nicaraguan *La Prensa,* and General Pinochet has attacked its financial support of the Chilean democratic opposition. And a recent *New York Times* front-page story revealed that the National Endowment for Democracy, through the A.F.L.-C.I.O. Free Trade Union Institute (run by another Social Democrat, Eugenia Kemble), is most responsible for giving *Solidarity* in Poland the financial werewithal to survive. Harrington ostensibly supports both of these social movements. What, I wonder, does he have to say about his former colleagues whose current work make opposition in Chile and Poland possible? Does he, like those on his left, condemn this as interventionism? Is he too going to oppose *Solidarity* because it is the recipient of National Endowment for Democracy funding?

While it is true that a small minority of the Social Democrats' membership, such as Linda Chavez, moved towards Reaganism, most of their members did not. Moreover, some of those he singles out for praise are actually in the Social Democrats rather than the Democratic Socialists of America, or are members of both organizations. The American Federation of Teachers, which he cites as a union under the Social Democrats' influence, had as its keynote speaker in 1988 none other than Democratic Socialists of America member William Julius Wilson, whose book Harrington says documented and analyzed "the problem of the underclass better than anything written before it." Yet Wilson, a member of the Democratic Socialists, also serves as a member of the Advisory Board of the supposedly conservative Social Democrats.

Actually, the problem Harrington fails to address is that as the Reagan era comes to an end, his *bête noire* of neoconservatism is becoming increasingly irrelevant. Having started by proclaiming the Soviet Union an unmitigated "evil empire," President Reagan is ending his term by adopting his own version of détente, much to the consternation of hard-liners who opposed his Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty. Thus Lipset has argued that neoconservatism "basically has ceased to exist." *Glasnost,* Lipset provocatively suggests, combined with new reductions in East-West tensions, will re-

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lieve ideological conflicts linked to foreign policy, and Harrington will undoubtedly find that many of his former comrades in the Social Democrats have more in common with him than with truly right-wing Republicans.

There is but one exception. "Central American policy," Lipset writes, "may remain as a major point of divisiveness." It is in this regard that we must turn to Harrington's views of Nicaragua and United States policy, which is symptomatic of the major weakness in his position. He talks proudly of participation in the spring 1987 march on Washington against intervention in Central America, but ignores the participation of black and left extremists like Stokely Carmichael, and the scores of banners proclaiming the illegitimacy of the State of Israel. Harrington, who once asked "Does the Peace movement need the Communists?" and strongly answered no, now seems to think, although he avoids addressing the issue directly, that such participation with extremists is permissable—since they too see the United States as the main enemy.

Harrington, convinced that we live in the post-cold war era, seeks a "break-out of the Cold War definitions of socialism" prevailing in the fifties. He proposes this be done by seeking an opening to the third world, by endorsing the economic and social policies of Socialist International leaders Willy Brandt, the late Olof Palme and Michael Manley, who proposed a massive economic aid program for the third world funded by the richer countries of the industrial West. Their plan certainly merits serious consideration. However, the new policy also seems to include the decision to denigrate all meaningful criticism of third-world Leninism. In practical political terms, it means allowing the Sandinistas to receive observer status within the Socialist International, extending a fraternal hand to the Salvadoran guerillas' civilian representatives, and giving membership in the Socialist International to Maurice Bishop's New Jewel Movement in Grenada. (Harrington explains that in supporting membership for a black power group, he was "willing to vote for anything approved by Lionel Jospin, the French Socialist Party's First Secretary," as if that is an explanation. Would Harrington vote to endorse the French Socialist Party's hard-line nuclear policy? The answer is self-evident.)

Harrington himself became, at Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Miguel D'Escoto's suggestion, the American member of the Socialist International's Committee to Defend the Nicaraguan Revolution. As a member of that group, he traveled to Nicaragua in 1981. Har-

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rington is aware "of how often 'revolutionary tourists' had been seduced by those they had casually—and not always accidentally—met in the Soviet Russia of the twenties and thirties or Mao's China of the fifties and sixties." And yet, he admits that it was "a heady experience" to feel "identification with an actual living revolution."

Harrington's opposition to his former comrades who went on to lead the fight against the Sandinistas has blinded him to the possibility that their charges about the Sandinistas might be more accurate than his own apologia. He complains that Carl Gershman was near to being "hysterically wrong" about what might happen in Nicaragua. What Harrington does is to invoke as his own the latest style of left-wing apologia; that is, there were of course hard-line Marxist-Leninists in Nicaragua who desired a Soviet/Cuban state as their model, but there were also pragmatic indigenous radicals opposed to them. The principal point, he argues, is that the United States "acted as the recruiting sergeant for the 'Marxist-Leninists,' i.e., its policies provided proof that the simple-minded theories of American imperialism espoused by the 'hards' were true." As for Nicaragua voting in the United Nations with the Soviet Union under Brezhnev, on Afghanistan, he replies that it was not the Soviet Union that had "sponsored armed interventions in Nicaragua six times in forty years."

Harrington obviously does not agree with Octavio Paz, who addressed the Mexican left on these very issues, and who wrote that he was "quite aware that it is not easy for any Nicaraguan to forget the fatal intervention of the United States in the internal affairs of the country for more than a century, nor its complicity with the Somoza dynasty." "But do past grievances, which justify anti-Americanism, justify pro-Sovietism?" asked Paz. Harrington suggests he thinks that it does; at best he fails to understand, as Paz puts it, that "the government of Managua could have taken advantage of the friendship of Mexico, France, and the Federal Republic of Germany, as well as the sympathy of the leaders of the Second International, in order to explore a path of independent action that would neither deliver it to the hands of Washington nor turn the country into a bridgehead for the Soviet Union. It has not done so." In Nicaragua, Paz writes, a "popular uprising . . . national in scope," was taken over from the start by "an elite of revolutionary cadres" whose one goal was to establish "a bureaucratic-military dictatorship

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modeled on the one in Havana." That elite, Paz forthrightly told the Mexican left, "is transforming itself day by day, before our very eyes, into a Communist dictatorship." Thus Paz saw fit to condemn as "simplistic nonsense" the very kind of logic accepted by Harrington.

Harrington prefers to explain the pro-Soviet positions of the Sandinistas as based on an "understandable hostility toward Washington," as if that hostility explains Sandinista policy. And nowhere does he give us any examples that would show how he tried to give support to those unnamed anti-Leninist pragmatists among the Sandinista leadership. Indeed, Harrington himself stood on the sidelines during negotiations that might have prevented war, in 1984 at the Socialist International Rio meeting between then opposition leader Arturo Cruz and Sandinista party chieftain Bayardo Arce. Meeting under the auspices of Socialist International leader and former Venezuelan President Carlos Andreas Perez, the negotiations led nowhere as a tentative agreement collapsed.

Harrington writes that the failure to reach an agreement occurred because the Reagan administration did not desire a "Cruz 'ticket' in the Nicaraguan elections," since the Sandinistas would win and "their prestige and legitimacy would be greatly enhanced." Hence, he writes, "the influential presence of the C.I.A. among [Cruz's] colleagues meant he would not be allowed to agree to any formula for fair elections, because Washington did not want fair elections." Harrington then writes that in an interview years later, Cruz "confirmed my guess and regretted his failure to make the deal offered in Rio."

Harrington's observations are disingenuous and based on a selective reading of the record. It is true that in retrospect Cruz thinks he should have run in the scheduled elections, whatever the limitations imposed by the Sandinistas. But Cruz does not accept blame for the failure to reach an agreement at Rio, nor does the evidence establish that case. The reason why a deal was not struck was quite simple: the Sandinistas reneged precisely when they saw that Cruz was willing to accept the terms laid out. Harrington argues that the Reagan administration sought a military solution; that is, arming of *contras* to overthrow the Nicaraguan government. But the agreement Cruz *had* accepted would have included an end to the *contra* war, in exchange for a guarantee of meaningful elections in which the opposition could freely campaign. If Harrington is so sure

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the Sandinistas would have won had Cruz participated, why does he think that the Sandinistas refused to agree to extend the election deadline—the issue at hand—and allow Cruz to wage a real campaign? An electoral victory by the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN), after all, would certainly have legitimized their power.

What Harrington chooses to ignore is the overwhelming evidence about the Sandinistas' real agenda. We have known for a few years—Harrington certainly must have read Robert Leiken's three-part series about the elections in *The New York Review of Books*—about Bayardo Arce's secret speech to FSLN cadre, in which he explained to party militants that while elections were a "hindrance" to their goal, they could serve as "an expedient to deprive enemies of an argument." Even George Black, then of the North American Congress on Latin America and now an editor of *The Nation,* wrote in a *New York Times* op-ed piece that the *commandantes* found "elections a nuisance except insofar as they would help to 'perfect revolutionary power'." And Black honestly wrote that at the Socialist International meeting, it was only the combination of Perez's and the Socialist International's pressure that had forced Arce to agree even to negotiate with Cruz in the first place. Unlike Harrington, Black explained that Bayardo Arce, not Cruz, backed out "just when an agreement appeared to be within reach." A similar conclusion was also reached by James Chace, the noted anti-interventionist scholar, who is now with the Carnegie Foundation. Chace wrote in *The New York Times Magazine* of November 25, 1984, that the Sandinistas "refused to extend the deadline for registration . . . despite pleas from Western European and Latin American socialist leaders on the scene." The breakdown took place, he concluded, "precisely because the Sandinista hard-liners did not want to risk the possibility of a large pro-Cruz vote." Nowhere does Harrington tell his readers that the agreement broke down because Arce, not Cruz, walked out at the crucial moment.

One would have hoped that Harrington, as the only American member of the Socialist International's Committee to Defend the Nicaraguan Revolution, would have joined Perez and his comrades in pressuring the Sandinistas. Indeed, I spoke with Cruz and his son a few days before the Socialist International meeting. They informed me that they wished to speak with Harrington to make known their views. Cruz Jr. in particular, an adviser to his father and a former

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Sandinista official, was most anxious to gain socialist and left support for the anti-Sandinista cause.

I called Mike the day before he left and urged him to speak to Cruz and sound him out. He did not, despite his own presence at the Rio meeting. The end result was adoption of a position of solidarity with the repressive regime in Managua. In 1985 Democratic Socialists of America invited Nicaragua's Foreign Minister, Miguel D'Escoto, to address their convention as featured speaker. It was as if Norman Thomas, who opposed the war in Vietnam in order to "cleanse the American flag, not burn it," had asked North Vietnam's Foreign Minister, Le Duc Tho, to address the Socialist Party's convention. But just as the Democratic Socialists of America convention was to take place, the Sandinistas inconveniently proclaimed their 1985 State of Emergency, whose provisions Harrington realized were "repressive measures . . . aimed at legitimate internal opposition, including the unions, rather than at the *contras*." Did Democratic Socialists of America then withdraw the invitation to D'Escoto, or at least openly and strongly condemn the Sandinista repression?

What they did was to agree "that we would raise the issue with D'Escoto in private." With this act of what one might call constructive engagement, Harrington assures his readers that D'Escoto and Ambassador Carlos Tunnerman, after meeting with him, "understood what I was saying." And at their convention, Democratic Socialists of America's co-chair, Barbara Ehrenreich, "within a context of decisive and principled opposition to American intervention . . . told of how upset we socialists were by what had happened in Managua. It was only a passage in her talk," Harrington acknowledges, but he sees it as a "distinct and unmistakable passage."

The rush of events, at any rate, has shown us just how the Sandinista leaders took Harrington's private criticism to heart. One can envision the laughter that must have ensued between D'Escoto and Tunnerman after Harrington left the room: recent Sandinista actions are a testimony to the effectiveness of Harrington's "private" quiet diplomacy. Just as his book appeared, the Sandinistas once again instituted a new crackdown, having won political defeat of the *contras* in the American Congress. And again they have shown that their crackdown is aimed at the genuine popular classes, the kind of people Harrington identifies with and defends in countries under the sway of right-wing regimes. A militant unionist, head of Nicaragua's

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old pro-Moscow Communists, put it this way: "The Sandinistas have achieved the impossible. They have united the opposition against them and turned the popular classes into supporters of the right." One wonders if Harrington would second Oscar Arias's comment after the 1988 crackdown, that "before it was the United States that was isolated—now it is Nicaragua that is completely alone."

One looks in vain in 1988 for criticism of the Sandinistas from Harrington and Democratic Socialists of America, when it is most needed, and for criticism without the qualification that whatever the failings of the *commandantes,* they are the fault of the United States. When this writer was in Managua in 1987, he overheard a conversation between Alejandro Bendana, Secretary-General of the Foreign Ministry, and a leader of the Institute for Policy Studies, now a senior advisor to Jesse Jackson. Bendana asked at one point: "How about Michael Harrington? Can we still depend on him to defend us?" Unfortunately, we know what the answer is.

Harrington also writes about Grenada and the New Jewel Movement as if his effort to "persuade them to move in a democratic and civil libertarian direction" was being listened to. Harrington alludes to the so-called Grenada papers, but only to mention that the State Department distributed those which revealed that New Jewel and other third-world parties had met with the Sandinistas to plot "concerted action in the SI." He simply says that the State Department's attempt to paint this as part of a "'Leninist' conspiracy . . . was not at all convincing." Has Harrington not read the entire Grenada papers, which have been published in various editions? What they clearly reveal is a crude, dogmatic, and even frightening Caribbean version of Stalinism, in which Maurice Bishop and the New Jewel Movement indeed showed their desire to create a dictatorship in their tiny island. Moreover, the Grenada documents were not distributed by the State Department, but by a member party, then the governing party of Barbados. And no one has ever challenged the accuracy of the documents or the essence of what was revealed in them.

Moreover, Harrington remains unconvincing when he says that blame for Bishop's murder rests "on Washington's hands" because Bishop had been planning to "democratize his revolution." As always, Harrington's hopes are portrayed as reality when it comes to apologizing for third-world dictatorships. Against the tide of evidence, Harrington prefers to see Bishop in a good light. The

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evidence from those Grenada papers, however, suggests that Bishop and his cadre conned Harrington, who reserved his anger for those Social Democrats who saw reality more clearly than he and who persisted in telling the truth.

And yet, there is much to admire about Michael Harrington. He has an enduring hope that the majority of human beings on our planet can somehow democratically control the conditions of their life. He has single-handedly not let us forget the evil and injustice of grueling poverty in the richest country in the world, and he has worked around the clock to build a political movement he hopes will lead towards that goal. How sad that this quest has, in recent years, pushed him uncritically towards the far left, and led him to support politicians and movements hardly worthy of his concern and best political efforts.

—R. R.

* * *

Ronald Radosh's review of my recent life—if not of my recent book—argues that, in a noble quest for a beautiful dream, I have moved "uncritically towards the left," supporting "politicians and movements hardly worthy of . . . [my] concern and best political efforts." Why did I thus betray my otherwise decent self?

Because I was "seeking an opening to the avowed antidemocratic left—including fellow travelers who may have broken with the old pro-Moscow Communist Party, but whose intellectual orbit and political practice had not strayed beyond the point of their origin. Thus Harrington, who had rejected marching with Communists in peace marches of the sixties, now sought to have his old enemies join him in his new organization." More bluntly put, I was an opportunist and, I would add, a stupid opportunist since it was clear that the people to whom Radosh refers would not have filled a good-sized hall, much less served as the basis for a new movement.

Of somewhat more world-historical significance, a similarly simplistic psychology is used to account for the behavior of the entire European social democracy in the third world. They, too, are said to have sold their soul for a mess of Marxism-Leninism.

I will not, the reader will be happy to learn, correct all of Radosh's errors of fact and polemical exaggerations. What I will do is to treat a few exemplary questions posed by his critique which

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bear on some of the serious political themes of the times. In particular, I will look at a conspiracy methodology which explains lives, socialist mass movements and a critique of neoconservatism on the basis of opportunistic corruption.

The essential comes out in Radosh's discussion of the engagement of Willy Brandt and the Socialist International with movements in the third world that range from socialist, through the less-than-democratic, to the downright authoritarian. What is involved is an encounter with the moral and political anomalies of a history largely shaped by Western capitalism.

In 1976, when Brandt took over as President of a moribund Socialist International, he got the prior agreement of the major European Socialist leaders to a project of reaching out to the third world. Democratic socialism, he knew, was largely a white, European phenomenon (the two Japanese member parties were an exception and, in another way, so were the Labour Parties of Australia, New Zealand, Israel, and the New Democrats in Canada). That, he argued on moral *and* practical grounds, was an intolerable limitation. Socialism would completely forfeit its basic commitment of solidarity with the wretched of the earth if it contented itself with creating better and better welfare states for a relatively small minority of the world's people (this was before the crisis of the welfare state had become apparent).

On a practical level—and this notion was to inform the work of the nonpartisan Brandt Commission on North/South and its two reports—Brandt anticipated the global debt crisis which exploded with the near default of Mexico in 1982. The North, he said, could not solve its problems if the South were so ruined that it could not buy from the advanced economies; the South could not transform itself without massive aid from the North. Therefore, there had to be a common solution to a common crisis. This plan, Radosh comments, "certainly merits serious consideration."

This perfunctory bow to the agony of the majority of human kind lasts for one sentence. Then the real point, which is treated at great length, emerges: "But the policy also, however, seems to mean the less than convincing decision to denigrate all meaningful criticism of third-world Leninism." Willy Brandt and his friends, who had watched with terrible anguish as the East German Vopos killed their *Landsleute* and comrades at the Berlin Wall, had gone soft on communism much as I had.

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This is, I think, preposterous on the face of it and, in any case, it was not, and is not, true. When I went to Managua in 1981 as part of a delegation led by Felipe Gonzalez and Carlos Andreas Perez (which included a representative of the just victorious French Socialists who had all but eviscerated the Communist Party in their country), we spent hours in a closed meeting with the Political Committee of the Sandinistas in which every single Socialist speaker hammered away at the centrality of democracy; free elections, nonalignment, etcetera. As I recounted in my book—Radosh leaves out my facts which interfere with his theses—over the years we argued with the Sandinistas against any "Marxist Leninist" conceptions in Nicaragua to the point that our repetition became almost boring.

At the Rio meeting of the International prior to the Nicaraguan elections—Radosh's account of it is a melange of half-truths learned secondhand—the Sandinistas met under the aegis of Carlos Andreas Perez of Venezuela, one of their most outspoken critics who could not be dismissed since, as president of his country, he had helped them during the struggle against Somoza. The Sandinistas made some basic concessions including *moving the date of the elections*. (Radosh's confusion on this count is a result of the fact that he is talking about a later appeal to postpone the elections which came after Arturo Cruz, as the spokesperson of the anti-Sandinista *Coordinadora*, had refused the Sandinista compromise.) Did the Socialists, then, turn the Sandinistas around? No. Did they have a positive, and democratic, influence upon them so that the elections were, by Central American standards, relatively open and an utter contradiction to the notion that the society was "totalitarian"? Yes.

That limited, but unmistakable, success was a result of the fact that the Brandt initiative led to an historic transformation of the International which gave it some moral authority in the third world. There are now over twenty member parties in Latin America and the Caribbean, some of them—the Venezuelans, Costa Ricans and Ecuadorians—now in power. But there was, and is, a problem, one which I explored at length in my book. The third world is, for reasons not of its own making, not filled with democratic, much less social democratic or socialist, movements. Therefore, said Brandt, and the International all but unanimously agreed, there must be contact and dialogue with political organizations and movements which are most emphatically not socialist and with which socialists have profound disagreements.

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This did not mean a decision to "denigrate all meaningful criticism of third-world Leninism" (and "third-world Leninism" is a term with all of the precision and predictive power of "Italian Catholicism"). The Socialist International communicated with—and gave critical support to—the Eritrean Liberation Front which was and is locked in armed struggle with the "Leninist" regime of Mengistu; it heard representatives from East Timor and their protest against the murderous policies of the Indonesians. Moreover, the Sandinistas became observers *before* their conquest of power, at a time when they were supported by democrats of every stripe. Their first emissary to the International after the victory was Eden Pastora, who later took up arms against his comrades. And on our visit to Managua in 1981, Bernt Carlsson, then the Secretary General of the International, showed his fear of criticizing Marxism-Leninism by ostentatiously going to the offices of *La Prensa* and taking out a subscription.

I could multiply such embarrassing facts *ad nauseum* but I prefer to get back to the real reason for the International's shift: not an imaginary desire to woo Marxist-Leninists (which, in addition to everything else, would have been political suicide at home) but a real concern for the wretched of the earth and a policy that might alleviate the crisis of the welfare state in the North as well as the misery of the people of the South. Were there risks in such an undertaking? Of course. Thank God, they were taken.

There is indeed a "third worldism" which holds that the citizens of imperial powers have no right to criticize the violations of basic human rights in their ex-colonies. That is, I have argued throughout my political life, a way of transforming the old imperialist rationale of *la mission civilatrice* into an excuse for indigenous authoritarians who must educate childlike peoples. There is a symmetrical theory which ignores history just as the third worldists deify it. National liberation movements and governments are judged by Western standards as if the latter were not a product of historical conditions and long, bitter struggles. If, it is argued, the Nicaraguan elections were less than perfect—and they were—*therefore* they were simply a front for totalitarianism. This is the slippery slope on which Radosh is now sliding.

This point of view has, however, considerable tolerance for any third world movement which take an anticommunist oath. The *contras*, initiated by the C.I.A., organized around a *Somocista* cadre and

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trained by fascist officers from the then Argentinian dictatorship, become—obscenely—"freedom fighters." A Jonas Savimbi is forgiven his alliance with South African *apartheid*, his former Maoism and . . . Leninism because he fights an Angola supported militarily by Fidel. Lo, one is on the road to the distinction between tolerable authoritarianisms and intolerable totalitarianisms (i.e. Communist regimes, Communist supported regimes, suspected Communist supported regimes) immortalized by Jeane Kirkpatrick.

Let me be specific. The African National Congress (ANC) contains a not insignificant Communist cadre in an organization which is composed of many other tendencies. The movement often sees those Communists as selfless militants with ties to a Soviet Union which has largely supported the anti-*apartheid* battle. That such support was cheap for a power that never had African colonies is true; so is the fact that the Soviets have violently repressed self-determination in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan and, by threats, in Poland. Does that then mean that one should turn one's back on the ANC, predicting the inevitable Communist domination of the organization?

The Socialist International supported the ANC's struggle because the ANC is one of the most effective organizations in a fight against racism and for basic human rights. And it has given observer rights to the ANC, even though, some years ago, its representative delivered a Moscow party-line denunciation of the Chinese Communists. It knows what it is doing and, as Brandt remarked rather wearily at a meeting in Botswana, does have some serious experience in dealing with communism. I am also proud that Democratic Socialists of America sponsored a national tour for an ANC spokesperson. I even think that democratic socialist solidarity with the ANC on the basis of a principled opposition to *all* imperialisms might strengthen the democratic forces in South Africa.

It was precisely in the name of that principled anti-imperialism that, at the 1985 DSA Convention in Berkeley alluded to by Radosh, we did not simply privately communicate our opposition to certain Sandinista policies and have Barbara Ehrenreich state her own opposition publicly. De Scoto shared the stage with a representative of the ANC and of . . . *Solidarnosc*. (Radosh's questioning of my continuing support of the Polish struggle is beneath contempt.)

Does my commitment to deal with these moral complexities lead to difficulties and even mistakes (like not checking out the New

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Jewel Movement carefully)? Yes. But it doesn't lead to a one-sentence dismissal of the socialist program for the third world and a fanatic, distorting obsession with communism as the only, and utterly decisive, issue.

Secondly, just as I—and all of the European social democracy—sold out democratic principles to curry favor with the Marxist-Leninists, so I developed the theory of neoconservatism in order to unfairly read my right-wing social democratic opponents out of the liberal movement by labeling them as neoconservatives. My reaction to a massive shift in American intellectual and political life is thus reduced to a nasty little factional manuever which then—and I do not know if I am supposed to be delighted or ashamed at the power imputed to me, though I am certain that I am surprised—had a major impact upon the nation's politics. Would that my conspiracies were indeed so marvelously effective! I would try them more often.

Unfortunately, Radosh can cite Seymour Martin Lipset's fanciful "Neoconservatism: Myth and Reality" in the July/August, 1988 issue of *Society* in behalf of his own fantasy. This is unfortunate since Lipset is a serious, and usually fair, analyst—but not this time.

According to Lipset, I coined the term *neoconservative "in order to* discredit the right wing of the dissolved party, Social Democrats, USA, and their intellectual fellow travelers. . . . What Harrington was endeavoring to do was to tell the left-of-center world, particularly the militant New Left students who regarded self-described left social democrats like himself and Irving Howe as nonradicals, there was a difference between them and right-wing hawkish social democrats." [my emphasis] My "labeling," Lipset continues, was remarkably effective: it convinced the traditional rightists to welcome the neos; worse, it confused people about the "Jackson" Democrats by making them think that the latter were "hard-line right-wingers on domestic as well as foreign issues, whereas in fact almost all of them remained supportive of welfare planning state and New Deal policies."

This is nonsense, even if the nonsense of an otherwise decent and intelligent man.

I first learned that I had "coined" the term *neoconservative* in an article by Daniel Patrick Moynihan in the fall 1985 anniversary issue of *The Public Interest*. Of some significance, Moynihan did not take umbrage at the term and rather gaily referred to me and my

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friends as that part of the left with which he and *The Public Interest* had friendly exchanges. I am not at all sure that I did in fact "coin" the word. It was in common use among *Dissent* editors and other associates of mine, and I do not have the least idea who was the first to use it.

It was occasioned, not by some tempest in a sectarian teapot, but by the fact that a sea change was taking place in the intellectual world—for instance, the *Commentary* Magazine which published my first article on poverty in 1959 was in the process of a profound transformation—and in the Democratic Party. I was, I must confess, much more interested in what was happening in serious politics than in attitudes in Social Democrats, U.S.A. Lipset, who cites nothing to prove his point, claims to have known my motivation. Yet the public facts demonstrate that he is, at best, quite confused.

After my friends and I split with the Social Democrats—the triggering event was when an old comrade of mine who had thumbed her nose at the F.B.I. in the fifties told me that she hoped that Nixon would wipe out the Stalinoid, George McGovern—the SDs engaged in a vendetta against me. There was a huge mimeographed document detailing all of my sins since birth: a trade unionist who simply endorsed a dinner at which we—the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC)—were honoring one of his good friends received the document as a follow-up to a phone call telling him of how dangerous I was; a one-time protégé of mine, who has spent much of the sixties promoting me and my ideas, explained in a *Commentary* symposium that what had poisoned that decade was the psychological theory of poverty in *The Other America*; and so on. But I, and DSOC, the organization which I chaired, had an informal rule against any reply to these attacks. We wanted to reach out to people who had never even heard of Max Shachtman and the theory of bureaucratic collectivism. More to the point, we did. To thousands of them.

Did I maliciously confuse people about the politics of the liberals or social democrats who were hard-line on foreign policy but not on domestic issues? As I recount in *The Long-Distance Runner*, one of my favorite slogans after the 1972 election was the call to unite the constituencies of the "three Georges"—McGovern, Meany, and Wallace. Wallace, I argued, was using a bogus populism to promote a real racism; and Meany, I insisted—not always to the plaudits of many on the left—was quite progressive on issues like full employ-

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ment, progressive taxation, and national health. We had to reach out to him on those issues even as we fought him on foreign policy questions.

Lipset's analysis is shoddy enough, but Radosh's gloss on it becomes hilarious. The Social Democrats, he says, were actually antiwar because they were part of Negotiations Now and I was, and am, as unfair to them in charging them with supporting our involvement in Vietnam as the New Leftists who said that I was not "really" against the war. In fact, by 1972 the Social Democrats were frankly aligned with Meany's support of the war. More to the point, my disillusionment with comrades whom I loved and respected began precisely when I realized that they were using Negotiations Now as a front for effective sabotaging of efforts to end American intervention in Southeast Asia. In the immortal words of V.I. Lenin, they supported Negotiations Now the way a rope supports a hanging man.

I grow old, as the poem says. My basic point is made, and there is no need to apply it to all the other possible examples. If I have not discredited Radosh's methodology by now, further cases will hardly do the job. I wish only to add a personal note.

In 1978, we held a DSOC fund-raiser tied to the organization's fifth anniversary and my own fiftieth birthday, inevitably referred to as the "Five and Fifty" event. Ron, who had come to DSOC via the communist and New Left movements and, at that point, appreciated a desire for reconciliation that has been with me since the Catholic Worker days of my youth, organized a rather imaginative segment of the program which presented songs I had referred to in my books with some brief reference to their context.

One of them was a Pete Seger version of an African folk song about a lion. I had referred to it in *The Vast Majority*, my analysis and journalistic account of an encounter with the third world. I was in East Africa when that song had come to mind, and I told of all the ambiguities I felt about the culture of the Popular Front which was part a facade for Stalinist trickery and part the expression of genuine antifascist feelings. I did not hide my ambivalencies, my contradictions; I tried to speak of them honestly and candidly, and it seemed to me that Ron Radosh had understood my moral project. That is why I am so disappointed in his present explanations of my—and the Socialist International's—political complexities in terms of a simple conspiracy theory. I am saddened by his change of heart, of

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course, even though I do not think that past comradeship qualifies me for immunity from criticism. But I must say that I am disturbed that everything is made to turn on opportunism. That is not serious and it is not nice.

—M. H.

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Stanislaw Baranczak

WITOLD GOMBROWICZ: CULTURE AND CHAOS

A few days before the fateful date of September 1, 1939, the thirty-five year-old Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz disembarked a transatlantic liner that had just brought him to Buenos Aires on its maiden voyage across the ocean. Little did he know that those few steps down the ship's ladder would lead him into an abyss of obscurity. Instead of several weeks, he was to stay in Argentina for the next twenty-four years—a largely ignored writer from the margins of a marginal literature, as exotic and odd to his émigré compatriots as he was to the Argentinian literary salons.

But, in some strange way, during those years obscurity and loneliness also acted on Gombrowicz's behalf. Their depths offered him, as it were, enough room to persistently work his way up to prominence. Forgotten by some, made light of by others, and unknown to most, he had no other choice but to fight for recognition, to try to impose his uniqueness upon the world. His post-1939 novels and plays which began to come out in the early 1950s, and above all his three-volume *Diary,* today considered by many one of the most important books in twentieth-century European literature, put into effect his brazen maxim: "Writing is nothing more than a battle that the artist wages with others for his own prominence."

Against all odds, he won that battle. Even before his death in 1969 he managed to become a celebrity in Europe (he was widely translated in France and Germany, and, as legend has it, lost the 1968 Nobel Prize by one vote) and an object of a veritable cult among young intellectuals in his native Poland. One of the things about American culture I fail to understand is why he still has to conquer these shores. The fact that his major novels have not been translated into English from the original but, ludicrously enough, have been retranslated from French translations (and lost much of their stylistic vigor in the process) does not fully explain Gombrowicz's so far rather limited impact in this country. True, an unprepared reader who opens any of his books may have the disquieting impression of encountering a total oddball, but has there ever been a shortage of total oddballs in American literature itself? Can't it assimilate another one, especially since on closer reading he

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turns out to make quite a lot of sense? One can only hope that the long-awaited publication in English of the first volume of Gombrowicz's *Diary** — which, among other merits, is also the most incisive commentary on Gombrowicz himself — has at last provided the reader with the set of keys necessary to enter this writer's System.

I'm capitalizing this word because, if we are to make anything of Gombrowicz, we need to see not only the apparently grotesque and bizarre side of his mind but its reverse side as well: its philosophical toughness, consistency, and precision. This is most evident in his *Diary* which, contrary to its title, only to some slight extent progresses along the lines of the genre's traditional form: a record of everyday events that may or may not resonate with some more profound reflection in the diarist's mind. At one point Gombrowicz even deliberately pokes fun at such a model of the diary by jotting down, tongue-in-cheek:

> I got up, as usual, around ten o'clock and ate breakfast: tea with ladyfingers, then Quaker Oats. Letters: one from Litka in New York, the other from Jeleński in Paris . . .
> At three, coffee and ham sandwich . . .
> I make known the above so that you will see what I am like in my daily routine.

But, on the whole, the *Diary: Volume One,* even though sprinkled with personal anecdotes and reminiscences, is hardly a detailed chronicle of Gombrowicz's "daily routine" in Argentina between 1953 and 1956. What he wrote under the disguise of a diary is, rather, a series of neatly interconnected essays, elaborating on various components of his ever-present System. One more manifest difference is that this particular diary was not supposed to wait in the writer's drawer for discovery by posterity; on the contrary, it was addressed to a specific contemporary audience, most of all to the Polish émigré intelligentsia that in the early 1950s formed the readership of the Paris-based monthly *Kultura*, where the *Diary* was initially published in installments.

In this historical and social context, the *Diary* was bound to be received as a no-holds-barred piece of impudence. Consider its immortal beginning:

**Diary: Volume One.* General Editor: Jan Kott. Introduced by Wojciech Karpinski. Translated by Lillian Vallee. Northwestern University Press.

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Monday
Me.
Tuesday
Me.
Wednesday
Me.
Thursday
Me.

To the Polish exiled reader in 1953, one thirsting in those troubled times for spiritual support and advice from the moral authority that the Polish writer traditionally had been, this monosyllabic confession of egotism sounded like the utmost effrontery. In spite of the conservative critics' and readers' outrage, however, Gombrowicz continued unswervingly in the same vein, making himself consistently the center of his diaristic universe. "Do not allow yourselves to be intimidated," he addressed other artists:

> The word "I" is so basic and inborn, so full of the most palpable and thereby the most honest reality, as infallible as a guide and severe as a touchstone, that instead of sneering at it, it would be better to fall to your knees before it. I think rather that I am not yet fanatical enough in my concern with myself and that I did not know how, out of fear of other people, to surrender myself to this vocation with enough of a categorical ruthlessness to push the matter far enough. I am the most important and probably the only problem I have: the only one of all my protagonists to whom I attach real importance.

This provocative bill of an egotist's rights forms, at the same time, a constitution for culture at large. At another point, Gombrowicz says:

> To be an individual . . . I do not want to say that collective and abstract thought, that Humanity as such, are not important. Yet a certain balance must be restored. The most modern direction of thought is one that will rediscover the individual man.

Today, twenty years after Gombrowicz's death, when numerous biographical books have already appeared dealing in detail with various phases of his life, it seems clear that this individualistic basis for his System had developed as a result of his early obsession with the rigid, schematic and oppressive Form that emerges in any in-

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terpersonal contact. From his early childhood on, he seemed to be destined to clash with and rebel against the various rituals of what he later called "the inter-human Church." He was born in 1904 in his father's country estate in central Poland; even though Gombrowicz Sr. soon switched from land-owning to industry management and the family moved to Warsaw in 1911, Gombrowicz grew up in an environment that cultivated traditional ways of life, respected social hierarchies and itself was full of aristocratic pretenses. The only rebellious and whimsical child in his family, Gombrowicz graduated with some difficulty from high school (which was to be portrayed as an oppressive realm of empty stereotypes in his first novel, *Ferdydurke*) and, acceding to his father's wish, studied law unenthusiastically at Warsaw University and in Paris. As a graduate back in Warsaw, he was already known well enough for his unorthodox views to be unable to find a job as a lawyer, which he accepted gratefully as a chance to devote himself entirely to writing. In 1933, his literary debut, a collection of short stories provocatively titled *A Memoir Written in Puberty*, came out to skeptical reviews; almost all of the critics dismissed the book as "immature," even though precisely the exploration and defense of "immaturity" was the author's chief objective. Nevertheless, Gombrowicz won recognition among the more avant-garde-minded authors. By the mid-1930s he already was viewed as a sort of guru by a circle of his not much younger fellow writers who gathered regularly at "his" table in the famous Ziemiańska café in Warsaw. It was *Ferdydurke* that finally made a genuinely big splash; published in 1937, this novel was savagely attacked by critics from both the extreme left and extreme right, but it was also acclaimed by some others as one of the most spectacular manifestations of the avant-garde spirit in Polish fiction. *Ferdydurke* was the last book Gombrowicz published while residing in Poland; before the war, only a play, three more short stories, and an unfinished novel of his managed to appear in periodicals, the novel being a hilarious Gothic parody serialized pseudonymously in a Warsaw tabloid. At this point, Gombrowicz was enough of a celebrity to be invited aboard a newly-built ocean liner—ironically, to take part in its trip as a representative of Reborn Poland's young literature, expected to strengthen cultural contacts with the Polish émigré community in Argentina.

While in Buenos Aires, he learned about the outbreak of war and decided not to return. There was more to it than his self-admitted incapacity to serve as a military hero. In a sense, it was one

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of Gombrowicz's many escapes from this or another Form that stifled and immobilized him; this time, from the Form that his entire life up to that point had taken on. The first Argentinian years, however, while indeed offering him inner freedom by cutting off all of his previous ties and obligations, and transplanting him onto the soil of a "young" country with no historical Form of its own, were also extremely difficult due to his isolation and financial hardship. To make ends meet, he finally took a poorly paid job as a clerk in a Polish bank in Buenos Aires. In whatever spare time he had, he worked on his new novels and plays, largely unknown as a writer among his Polish fellow exiles but, ironically, finding more and more admirers among young Argentinian literati. A sort of cult following that developed in the narrow circle of his Argentinian friends resulted in a collective Spanish translation of *Ferdydurke.* Meanwhile, Gombrowicz returned to the Polish émigré literary scene in 1953 with his new novel *Trans-Atlantyk* issued jointly with the play *The Marriage* in Paris. This particular novel, arguably Gombrowicz's best and certainly funniest (it is a shame that it remains untranslated into English), was met with vitriolic attacks from the conservative trenches of the émigré community for its satirical demolition of the most sacred patriotic clichés and general "lack of seriousness." On the other hand, after 1957–58, when four of Gombrowicz's books had been published in Poland during the brief period of political relaxation, he became an idol for many young writers and critics there.

Between 1957 and 1966, Gombrowicz published, through the same publishing house in Paris, the rest of his most important books written in exile: two novels, *Pornografia* and *Cosmos,* and *Diary* in three volumes, the last of which also included his third and final play, *Operetta.* The sixties finally brought him recognition in Western Europe, where no less than Camus and Sartre had been involved in persuading publishers and theaters to take on his work. In 1963, he received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation and left for Europe. After some time spent in West Berlin, he moved to Paris and finally settled with his young French-Canadian wife Rita in the small town of Vence in southern France. Translations, premieres, and literary prizes, all that dreamed-of European fame came along, however, with the rapid deterioration of his health. After a long struggle with respiratory diseases he died in Vence in 1969.

Gombrowicz's cult in Poland is a special matter. It has been spreading and intensifying ever since the appearance of his books in

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1957–58, but not without some profoundly bizarre twists, affecting particularly the *Diary*. The chief of these is that soon after 1958, and especially after the political attacks on Gombrowicz in the official media in the mid-1960s, his books were to all practical purposes banned in Poland. After the writer's death, the ban was partly lifted, but at the same time Gombrowicz's last will went into effect, a provision of which specified that his work not be published in Poland unless reprinted in its entirety. Since the authorities had objections to a couple of passages in the *Diary* dealing with the Soviet Union and communism, and Rita Gombrowicz was steadfast in abiding by her husband's will, an insane situation resulted and lasted for seventeen years: Gombrowicz's work was widely read in its smuggled-in Paris editions or underground reprints, critical books on him were published, and his plays were even staged in Polish theaters, but none of his books could be officially reprinted or bought in a bookstore. In 1986 the regime finally yielded, and a state-owned publishing house reprinted Gombrowicz's works but, as a breach of the agreement reached earlier with the writer's widow, the *Diary* appeared in expurgated form.

The lunacy of Poland's censors aside, this was, in fact, a fitting development in the posthumous career of the work that no orthodox and rigid mind could have ever accepted *in toto*. Not that the *Diary* is an anticommunist manifesto: Gombrowicz's thought was too all-encompassing to be preoccupied solely with politics, and his critique of Marxism on the pages of *Volume One,* though devastating, is just one particular application of his more general method. Regardless of what domain of existence he deals with, the same System with the same fundamental notions and antinomies underlies his vision of the human world.

The basic premise of Gombrowicz's thought is his obsessive awareness of man's solitude and helplessness in confrontation with the powerful pressure of culture—if we are to understand "culture" in a Freudian sense, as a collective superego that stifles the authentic impulses of the human self. Accordingly, the chief antinomy that underpins Gombrowicz's philosophical and literary system is the ineffaceable, ubiquitous conflict between the solitary individual and the others, the rest of the human world, in particular—all of society's petrified rituals, customs, stereotypes, or institutionalized relationships. The individual's natural need is to remain free, independent, spontaneous, unique, whereas the very presence of others crams him

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into the schematic framework of whatever is socially and culturally acceptable.

If Gombrowicz stopped at this point, he would appear a mere—and not terribly creative—continuator of the argument of Freud, if not Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the whole Romantic tradition. But he is much more original than that. His innately dialectic mind immediately counterpoises the argument with its exact opposite. He is equally aware that, contrary to his need to remain free and unique, the individual also fears isolation and desires to affirm himself through contacts with other people, through his reflection in the eyes of others. This contradiction is particularly dramatic in the case of an artist: He wishes to reveal his individual uniqueness to the audience, but in order to reach it and be understood, he has to resort to a comprehensible language of approved convention, which, in turn, destroys his uniqueness. In other words, each public manifestation of the artists' freedom-seeking self is tantamount to his self-imprisonment in a rigid scheme of finished shapes—and thus, it means his death as an artist.

Yet the situation of an artist, however dramatic, is for Gombrowicz just one version of a more universal paradox of human existence as such. In his view, every individual lives his life in constant suspension between two ideals: "Maturity" and "Immaturity." These two may be variously called Fullness and Unfulfillment, Completeness and Freedom, Perfection and Spontaneity, Typicality and Uniqueness or, perhaps most generally, Form and Chaos. Just as the protagonist of *Ferdydurke,* who sincerely desires to be mature, responsible and respected, but at the same time is secretly attracted to anything that is immature, chaotic and inferior, virtually all characters in Gombrowicz's fiction (more often than not, deliberate impersonations of himself and his own neurotic obsessions) are torn between their striving for Form on the one hand and Chaos on the other. As Gombrowicz puts it succinctly in his *Diary: Volume One:*

> The most important, most extreme, and most incurable dispute is that waged in us by two of our most basic strivings: the one that desires form, shape, definition and the other, which protests against shape, and does not want form.

In both his literary works and *Diary* this basic antinomy takes on the flesh of various specific interhuman relations, from politics to

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religion to sex. The struggle between Form and Chaos may reveal itself, for example, in its sociological version, in which Aristocracy represents the perfect (but also petrified) Maturity or Form, while Peasantry stands for spontaneous (but also inarticulate) Immaturity and Chaos. It may also be illustrated by the inequality of civilizations—Western civilization is, in this respect, an embodiment of Maturity, while the "second-rate" civilizations of countries such as Poland, "the poor relations of the [Western] world," represent Immaturity. Or, the tension between the extremes of Form and Chaos makes itself felt within the confines of the individual ego, as a self-contradictory, simultaneous yearning for the "perfection" embodied in a complete personality of an adult on the one hand and the "beauty" of a child's or adolescent's spontaneity on the other.

In fact, all these versions of the basic opposition between Form and Chaos have a common denominator in the concept of inequality; each opposing pair can be interpreted as a case of Superiority confronted with Inferiority. According to Gombrowicz, the very essence of human existence lies in the fact that the individual strives all of his life for Superiority and Form but in reality is by no means unequivocally attracted by these values, since their ultimate attainment equals spiritual petrification and death. Therefore, the individual secretly desires Inferiority, Immaturity and Chaos, because only these extremes offer a chance of freedom. Yet, on the other hand, the ultimate attainment of this other goal would mean isolation, impossibility of any communication and self-affirmation. In the final analysis, the conflict is insoluble. It can be only partly overcome and contained, if not fully resolved, by artistic creativity. Even though the artist can neither escape from nor achieve perfect Form, he can at least feel free to *play* with it. He can make both the Maturity of artistic convention and his own Immaturity "visible" instead of concealing them, and thus, by gaining a salutary distance from both, to liberate himself to a certain extent from their oppression.

Gombrowicz's way of relating everything to human Superiority and Inferiority means, in turn, that the focal point of his outlook is neither the individual *per se* nor society in general but, rather, what emerges at the point of their mutual clash: the "inter-human Church." His philosophy, as he puts it in *Diary: Volume One,* subscribes neither to individualist nor to collectivist philosophies but to "the third vision" built on the corpses of both: it is a vision of "man in relation to another man, a concrete man, I in relation to you and

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him. . . . Man through man. Man in relation to man. Man created by man."

At this central juncture, however, the consistency of his own argument forces Gombrowicz in his *Diary* to make a number of necessary qualifications and reservations. In order to prove that his philosophy of the individual is itself individual he has to distinguish his views from those popular philosophies of his time which for various reasons might be suspected of having influenced him. For such a programmatic artist as he was, Gombrowicz was amazingly well-versed in philosophy—in Argentina, he even supplemented his income for a while by giving occasional philosophy lessons—and the philosophical pages of *Diary: Volume One* testify to his impressive intellectual precision. He is perfectly aware that certain elements of his vision put him close to several existing doctrines but he identifies with none of them—not only for the simple reason that he had developed his own ideas before the emergence of some of these doctrines (such as existentialism), but because neither of them fits completely into his System. On the one hand, for instance, he clearly realizes his proximity to modern Catholicism:

> I am joined to it by its acute sense of hell contained in our nature and by its fear of man's excessive dynamics. . . . The Church has become close to me in its distrust of man, and my distrust of form, my urgent desire to withdraw from it, to claim "that that is not yet I," which accompanies my every thought and feeling, coincides with the intentions of its doctrine. The Church is afraid of man and I am afraid of man. The Church does not trust man and I do not trust man. The Church, in opposing temporality to eternity, heaven to earth, tries to provide man with the distance to his own nature that I find indispensable. . . . The important thing for me is that it and I both insist on the division of man: the Church into the divine and human components, I into life and consciousness. After the period in which art, philosophy, and politics looked for the integral, uniform, concrete, and literal man, the need for an elusive man who is a play of contradictions, a fountain of gushing antinomies and a system of infinite compensation, is growing.

Yet Gombrowicz, a declared atheist and rationalist, realizes with equal clarity that no authentic communication between him and a Catholic is possible: in the latter "Everything is already re-

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solved . . . because [he] already knows the ultimate truth about the universe . . . [and] is not allowed to entertain doubt."

On the other side of the ideological spectrum, Gombrowicz is aware that, at first glance, his vision might reveal considerable affinities with two other popular philosophies: existentialism and Marxism. His System indeed seems to have something in common with each of these two, in particular, with the claim of both that their ultimate goal is the demystification of human consciousness. More specifically, Gombrowicz seemingly finds a common ground with existentialism in regard to the important notion of freedom of the individual, whereas his concept of "man created by man" might be suspected of echoing the Marxist idea of man as a product of social conditions. Gombrowicz himself points to these analogies only to deflect the potential accusation of borrowing from the two doctrines by laying bare the inconsistencies or falsehoods inherent in both. He admits that his early work did bear, *avant la lettre,* some superficial similarity to existentialism, but he also points out that there is no room in his system for the notion of authenticity that the existentialists hold so dear:

> I . . . tried this authentic life, full of loyalty to existence in myself. But what do you want? It can't be done. It can't be done because that authenticity turned out to be falser than all my previous deceptions, games, and leaps taken together. . . . It seems impossible to meet the demands of *Dasein* and simultaneously have coffee and croissants for an evening snack. To fear nothingness, but to fear the dentist more. To be consciousness, which walks around in pants and talks on the telephone. . . . Strange. Philosophy, exhorting to authenticity, leads us into gigantic falsehoods.

Existentialist "authenticity" sounds an empty concept for Gombrowicz because in his "inter-human Church" nothing is free from the determining pressure of the presence of others. There is no authenticity as such, there are only masks of authenticity we put on; man has to be artificial as long as he wishes to remain part of the human community. For the same reason, while writing on Camus's *L'homme révolté,* Gombrowicz assaults the basic tenet of existentialism, its idea of the absolute moral freedom of the individual as reflected in the notion of conscience:

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> For me, conscience, the individual conscience, does not have the power that it has for him as far as saving the world. Don't we see again and again that the conscience has almost no voice in the matter? Does man kill or torture because he has come to the conclusion that he has the right to do so? He kills because others kill. He tortures because others torture. The most abhorrent deed becomes easy if the road to it has been paved, and, for example, in concentration camps the road to death was so well-trodden that the bourgeois incapable of killing a fly at home exterminated people with ease.

This, in turn, sounds disturbingly close to the premises of the Marxist philosophy of man, and Gombrowicz takes pains to define the differences between himself and the Marxists as clearly and unequivocally as possible. Even though he is instinctively repelled by the horrific cruelty that results from any application of Marxist principles to a society's life, he dismisses this emotional response as philosophically irrelevant. Equally irrelevant in this sense are all the other traditional reasons—conservative, religious, libertarian—for condemning Marxism. What matters for Gombrowicz is the question of intellectual honesty, of which Marxism is totally devoid. As a philosophy which claims to relentlessly unmask and demystify everything, its ultimate proof of honesty would be an attempt to unmask itself as well. This is, however, exactly what Marxism slyly avoids by refusing to apply its formidable dialectical apparatus of demystification to its own dialectic:

> Let us catch them red-handed. Let us check the cards, how they are being dealt here, and reveal the trick with which this entire dialectics becomes a trap. This dialectic and liberating thinking stops exactly at the gates of Communism: I am allowed to cast aspersion on my own truths as long as I am on the side of capitalism, but this same self-checking is supposed to cease the minute I join the ranks of the revolution. Here dialectics suddenly gives way to dogma as a result of some astounding about-face.

As we read these works, it may be useful to remember that they were written in the mid-1950s. Who else in world literature except this unknown Polish writer stranded in Argentina was then able to achieve, solely on the strength of his own inexorable honesty in ap-

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proaching the reality of ideas and facts, such independence of judgment, such clarity of perception? Gombrowicz's intellectual boldness, so striking in his *Diary* and still unmatched after more than three decades, is the boldness of someone who has fought and won a relentless battle. He himself preferred to define it as a battle for literary "prominence." But in his case prominence was merely an outward sign for something more essential: the writer's ultimate right to speak and be heard. The right that is due to the writer only when his mind stops at nothing in questioning the world's and its own self-delusions.

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FICTION

Danilo Kiš

RED STAMPS WITH LENIN'S PICTURE

Song of Songs 8:6

Dear Sir,

In the course of your rue Michelet lecture you asked, "What has become of Mendel Osipovich's correspondence?" and stated that the *Collected Works* published by Chekhov House in New York must be considered incomplete, that the correspondence might one day be found and will not therefore be limited to the twenty or so letters reproduced therein. After paying tribute to the labors of the tragically departed Iosif Bezimensky ("It took thirty years of research to pick up the trail of people who, though they had not lost their lives, did lose their names, cities, countries, even continents"), you concluded there was still hope that the letters would surface and "the irreparable would be repaired."

I have been prompted to write to you by your unbelievable—unbelievably audacious—conviction that the greater part of the correspondence still exists and that it is in the hands of an individual (I quote from memory) "who for sentimental reasons or out of certain other considerations does not wish to part with these valuable documents." It never entered my mind to ask you then, at the lecture, what it was that all of a sudden—because you expressed no such notion two years ago, nor did you mention anything of the sort in your preface—what it was that made you so certain as to state, "The individual in question, if luck is with us, may still be alive somewhere in Berlin, Paris, or New York!" Your optimistic conclusion was doubtless based primarily on the research of the late Bezimensky and on his archives, to which you have had access.

The individual whom you seek, sir, "The individual who holds the key to the mystery," as you put it, was sitting several feet from

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Editor's Note: "Red Stamps with Lenin's Picture" and "The Story of the Master and the Disciple" are selections from *The Encyclopedia of the Dead* by Danilo Kiš, to be published in March by Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc. English translation by Michael Henry Heim. Translation copyright © 1989 by Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc. All rights reserved.

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you at the lecture. Of course you do not remember her; no doubt you did not even see her. And if you had happened to notice her, you would have thought she was one of those women who come to public lectures pretending they want to learn something—so that they may depart for the next world with their earthly obligations fulfilled and say at the end of the road that they did not live their lives in darkness—but who in fact come only to forget for a moment their own loneliness, filled as it is with thoughts of death, or simply to see another human being.

Despite the solitude I live in, sir, I do not plague others with my memories, which are peopled, like a huge graveyard, by the dead; I do not frequent lectures, nor do I write letters to strangers and occupy my time waiting for replies. Yet God is my witness—as now you shall be, too—that I have written a great many letters in my life. And nearly all of them were addressed to one and the same person: Mendel Osipovich.

You, a connoisseur of his work (it is not my intention to point out your biographical inaccuracies), have no need of lengthy explanations; you will easily find your bearings.

In the poem with the puzzling title "Stellar Cannibalism" (Vol. I, p. 42), the "meeting of two stars, two beings," is by no means the "product of a close collaboration between preconscious and subconscious activity," as Miss Nina Roth-Swanson would have it; it is a poetic transposition of the electric shock that ran through Mendel Osipovich's soul the moment our eyes met in the offices of *Russkie Zapiski* (he had dropped in "accidentally and fatally") in Paris on a gloomy November day in 1922. Likewise, M.O. did not, as the aforementioned lady claims, "hymn his frustrations" in the émigré poems; he had always been what he himself called, though perhaps not without a tinge of irony, a "poet of circumstance."

I was twenty-three at the time. . . . But I do not matter, I do not matter in the least. Let us return to Mendel Osipovich. In the poem "Revelation," from the same cycle, the "cannibal stars" are neither "subconscious fears connected with the poet's origins and with exile" nor "the transposition of a nightmare," and least of all "totems"; they are the simple fusion of two images. On the day we met, Mendel Osipovich happened to have read an article in a popular-science magazine about stellar cannibalism, the phenomenon of double, *extremely close* stars (whence the line "Stars that touch foreheads and chins") which swallow each other in clouds of mist

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somewhere on the far side of the Milky Way. That was the first stimulus. Our meeting was the second. The two events merged into a single image. And since poets speak as prophets, the poem about cannibal stars became prophetic: our lives, sir, commingled cannibalistically.

I had of course heard of Mendel Osipovich before I met him: all Yiddish speakers in Russia at the time—and not only Yiddish speakers—had heard of Mendel Osipovich. Like every powerful, original personality, he was beset by rumors: he was merely a cheap imitator of Ansky, he had an illegitimate child, he corresponded with a famous German actress, he had had false teeth since the age of eighteen (when a jealous husband, a well-known Russian poet, had bashed in his jaw), he wrote his poems in Russian first and then translated them with his father's help, he was preparing to move to Palestine, and so on. Once I saw a portrait of him by Pyotr Rotov in the newspapers. I immediately cut it out and pasted it in my diary thinking, Dear God, that's what the man of my life must look like! (Ah, the pathos of our youth.)

And suddenly—dear God!—there he was standing opposite me in the offices of *Russkie Zapiski*, staring at me. I put my hands under the desk to keep him from seeing them tremble.

The next day he took me to dinner at a Russian restaurant in Montparnasse. Since, according to a story circulating at the time, Mendel Osipovich, like Byron, felt utter contempt for women who ate in public, I ordered nothing, hungry though I was, but a cup of unsweetened tea. Later, of course, I told him of the consequences of the Byronic anecdote. The result was the famous "anatomical poem," as Bezimensky calls it, in which "after a celebration of the flesh, there appears, like a kid glove turned inside out, the idealized quintessence of the internal organs, not only the heart but also the lilac of the lungs and windings of the gut." It is therefore a love poem par excellence, not "a series of fantasies about the maternal uterus"!

In a word, our love became "inexorable and inescapable"; we realized that, in spite of all impediments, we had to join our lives. I shall not go into the obstacles standing in our way: families, clans, relatives, friends, the Writers' Organization. And of course that poor, sickly little girl, who was always held up as a last argument.

At his request I returned to Russia and found work in the Moscow offices of *Der Shtern*. We could see each other every day. I was always close by, if not to say in his shadow. The poem "Sun

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Beneath a Pink Lampshade" is Mendel Osipovich's ironic reply to a remark I made about this. (And not "an obsession with menstrual blood," for goodness' sake!)

You are aware, sir, that M.O. was married at the time and had a daughter (or, as the estimable Nina Roth-Swanson writes, "M.O. had incarnated his youthful fantasies in the person of a wife-mother"!). Painful though it may be, I must again remind you of the fate of that unfortunate child, whom Roth-Swanson ignores, as if the fact of her congenital illness could cast a shadow on Mendel Osipovich's life.

Far be it from me to emend the arbitrary assessments of the critics, especially the analyses of Miss Nina Roth-Swanson—I have the *least* right to do so and the greatest—but there is one remark I feel I must make: N.R.-S., well aware of the sickly girl's existence—out of feminine sympathy and doubtless the maternal instinct (which is not always relevant to critical assessment)—interprets all poems in which the words *mayn kind* appear as "anguish relating to the sanctions of the superego and experienced as a feeling of guilt"! Poor Mendel Osipovich would turn in his grave, could he read those words. Not only because of their stunning banality, though primarily for that reason, but also because never, sir, did M.O. make the slightest allusion to that child in his works: he would have considered it sacrilegious. *I*, sir, am the "sinful parthenogenesis"; even though there was only a seven-year difference between us, *I* am the *mayn kind* of his poems. So much for the "in-depth analysis" of Nina Roth-Swanson and her endeavor, on the basis of the novels *The Hounds* and *Pillar of Salt* as well as the *Falling Star* collection, to suggest the absurd thesis of love as incest, "an attempt to violate taboos and experience catharsis as in a dream"! If you don't mind my saying so, the erudite Roth-Swanson would do well to spare Mendel Osipovich her "totems and taboos."

Need I tell you that M.O. often tried to break the bonds that kept him fettered "on a double chain, like anchors." But his unfortunate daughter, with an intuition given only to children and holy fools, was able to sense, the moment he stood in the doorway, his resolve to pronounce the fateful words he had recited on his way to her like a schoolboy on the way to an exam. Propped up on her pillows in bed, she would turn her mournful eyes to him and try to say something, which always ended in a terrifying, beast-like growl. M.O., torn by remorse, would sit down next to her, take her hand in

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his, and, instead of launching into his prepared speech, bury his head in the lap of his wedded wife. "God gave me this child along with my gift to keep me from growing proud," he would repeat, sobbing.

Crushed, he fled back to literature, to "The Promised Land." (When I think of the misunderstandings and betrayals that poem caused him!) Then he would make up his mind to leave me. Like a sickly child or holy fool, I sensed his intentions by the ring of the doorbell, the turn of the key in the lock. "There is no point in hurting anybody," he would say. "I have no right to love." We parted many times "for good," snapping our bonds like a silver thread, "the pearls rolling over yellowed, much scrubbed boards" (in my Merzlyakov Street walk-up apartment in Moscow), then falling immediately—"inexorably"—back into each other's arms. (The poem "Limbo" is nothing if not a response to those rifts.)

In the end—I say "in the end," for it took several years of suffering, of ruptures and separations—we realized that our lives were bound forever and that our feeble human powers were of no avail against our love or the obstacles in its path. "Such a love is born once every three hundred years," M.O. would say. "It is the fruit of life, and life its only judge. Life and death." That, then, is the meaning of "Limbo," a poem which, incidentally, Miss Nina Roth-Swanson's commentary reduces to utter nonsense. ("The image of the stream, the river, in the context of poetic speech, particularly when omitted, *suppressed,* derives from the dreamwork of the unconscious, and in dreams, by association, a flowing river, though invisible and merely sensed—a 'resonant abyss'—suggests both the murmur of words and the splash of urine." Now what is that gibberish supposed to mean?)

No, Mendel Osipovich never was my husband, but he was the meaning of my life, just as I was the "cure for his grief" (see the twin poems "The Prodigal Son" and "Gaea and Aphrodite," Vol. III, pp. 348–50). Ours was a love that needed none of the "gluttonous joy of mortals," that needed no proof; it nourished itself, consumed itself, but with a mutual flame.

And once the "time of fiery ruptures" was past, we became captives, hostages to each other, and the temperature curve of our "beautiful disease" grew steadier. I lost all "dignity," the last vestige of my upbringing. I no longer expected him to be anything but there, constant and solid as rock. I learned shorthand, the Guérin method, with a few additions of my own legible only to me. M.O.

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was at the peak of his fame at the time, which is to say much esteemed and much challenged; I was a young woman and still beautiful, a cause for much envy on the part of those who knew our secret. His feelings of guilt, the constant gnawings of his conscience, died down at last. During our years together, a "time of cruelty and tenderness," M.O. did his best work. (As for his biblical dramas, you must not forget, sir, that they contain dangerous allusions of the sort which, even if consigned to the drawer, could in those "wolfish times" expose an author to mortal danger. Reading Miss Nina Roth-Swanson's commentaries—I'm sorry, but I seem to keep bumping into her as if she were a wardrobe planted in the middle of a room—and her interpretation of Moses as the personification of "repressed hatred for the rabbi- and tyrant-father," I wonder whether Nina R.-S. did not dream her way through the years she spent in Russia "beneath the cruel skies of dear old Moses," when instead of practicing "in-depth analysis" she was a modest translator and lecturer.) I personally typed or copied out all Mendel Osipovich's works; I was, sir, the midwife to his literary labors (see, for example, the poem "She said: 'Amen'," Vol. II, p. 94). For years I kept a suitcase packed, ready to leave at a word from him. I spent "glorious nights of feral fever" in provincial fleabags and rented rooms. I remember—if I have the right to remember—the excitement we felt at our first merging in a Baku hotel: our clothes hung together in the wardrobe in lascivious intimacy. (I shall refrain from commenting on the interpretation Roth-Swanson gives the poem "Merging Skins," overstepping, as it does, the bounds of decency and common sense.)

You may ask, sir, what all this has to do with Mendel Osipovich's oeuvre. Well, sir, I am the Polyhymnia in the poem of that name (and its significance becomes clear only in the context of our experience). "In my every line, my every word, my every full stop I feel your presence like a drop of pollen," M.O. used to say. "Everything I have written, even everything I have translated, bears your mark." He translated the *Song of Songs* in 1928; that is, at a time when the rifts between us belonged to the past. (Zanikovsky's contention that the translation is "inaccurate" is ridiculous! The liberties M.O. took are justified by his own personal theory; there is no reason for Zanikovsky to bring in M.O.'s father, "the highly regarded Yosef ben Bergelson," and lay the blame on him. M.O. incorporated his own, personal experiences into translations. "How

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aside from sheer need, could I have derived such pleasure from translation?" he replied when I asked him about it. His versions of Catulles, Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, and Shakespeare's sonnets, which he prepared with the help of the late Izirkov, must also be read in this light.)

I shall pass over the historical events which like a harsh landscape provided the backdrop to our lives. When I look back, it all comes together in a mixture of snow, rain, and mud, in the "unity of intolerable frost." But you may rest assured, sir, that Mendel Osipovich had nothing of the stern mien his ascetic prose might suggest. The letters he wrote to me were as baroque as Flaubert's; they spoke of all the things his poetry speaks of—and of things it does not: creative joys and creative crises, innermost states, cities, hemorrhoids, landscapes, reasons to commit suicide and reasons to go on living, the difference between prose and poetry. His letters combined amorous sighs, erotic hints, literary theories, travelogues, and fragments of poetry. I still recall descriptions of a rose, of a sunrise, variations on the theme of bedbugs, speculations on the probability of life after death. I remember the description of a tree, a simile in which the crickets beneath a hotel window in the Crimea chirp like wristwatches being wound, the etymology of a name, of a city, the interpretation of a nightmare. The rest, everything else I can remember, was words of love: pointers on how to dress for the winter or comb my hair, prayers, "ardent cooing," and scenes of jealousy—unfounded, needless to say.

Then one day I received a letter. I need not tell you, sir, what went on in the terrible year of 1949, when every member of the Organization of Yiddish Writers was liquidated. The incident I am speaking of occurred just prior to those tragic events. I received a letter meant for another. Perhaps I ought to have subjected my curiosity to the rules of etiquette and left it unread, but that was too much to ask, especially since my name in Mendel Osipovich's hand was on the envelope. No, it was not a love letter; it was about the sense, the meaning of some verse—advice to the young woman who was translating Mendel Osipovich's poems into Russian. But the letter was permeated with a certain ambiguity, a mixture of "Dionysian delirium" and "incorrigible wood-grouse pride" (to quote from his verse itself). Mendel Osipovich's soul held no secrets for me. I was certain, sir, and still am (if certainty is not mere consolation or self-justification) that an ordinary *Liebesbrief* would have hurt me less, shaken me less: I could have forgiven him his "Dionysian delirium";

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in the name of our love, our unique, unrivaled love, I believe I could have forgiven him an infidelity of the flesh—with poets as with the gods, anything is forgivable. But the fact that he wrote to the young woman about his poetry, his soul, the mysterious sources of his inspiration, the fact that, in one ambiguous context proffered by the poetry itself, he shared with her something I felt belonged to me alone, and to him, a kind of *jus primae noctis*—that, sir, is what shattered me, shook my very being, and put my erstwhile serenity to the test. All at once, in a disturbance of seismic proportions, the "yellowed boards" opened beneath my feet and I began to flounder as one flounders in a nightmare. I realized that the only way I could stop my headlong fall was by taking decisive action, breaking a mirror, the lamp with the pink shade (that, too, a gift from him), a Chinese teapot, or a precious thermometer. Otherwise, I'd have had to do something much more terrible. Then it occurred to me: the letters.

Because his apartment had been searched several times, Mendel Osipovich had moved our correspondence to mine. "I fume at the idea of *faceless people* poking their noses into your letters," he told me. I had tied the letters together with a black velvet ribbon he bought me when we first met. It appears in one of his poems, a poem in which enjambment stretches from line to line like a headband from temple to temple. From the moment I cut the ribbon with a pair of scissors I had handy—I must have been intending to cut my hair—my fall went into slow motion. As soon as I tore the first letter, I knew I could not retreat, and this despite the realization running through me like a knife that I would regret my action, that I already regretted it. Our love was now like a precious novel with pages missing, like a defective copy one returns to a bookshop. So blinded was I by fury and remorse that I could make out nothing but a blur of stamps like a blob of red sealing wax. Since you are so at home in Mendel Osipovich's work, you must be wondering how *he* would have depicted the scene, this Flemish portrait with light streaming through the curtains onto the young woman's face and hands. For the sake of light, for the sake of the image, would he have lit a fire, fanned its flame, opened the doors of the stove? Would he have added a fireplace? (I had no fireplace, and the iron stove was out, even though it was March, icy March.) I don't believe so. A "transparent twilight" is all he would have needed to illuminate the

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face of the woman by the window, and the red stamps with Lenin's picture would have sufficed to highlight "the red seal of royal blood." (The explanation you give of "royal blood" is perfectly valid.) Oh, he would have found a way to evoke the radiance of hell!

I could tell he had already discovered the fatal error. The moment he laid eyes on me, he knew what I was up to: there was a pile of shredded paper at my side. I stood up and thrust his books at him. "I've torn out the inscriptions," I said. Then I handed him an envelope full of photographs. "I've destroyed the ones that showed us together."

I saw him only once again—at a rally, reading a proclamation. He was a broken man by then; he sensed his end was near. You are aware of what followed. One night the "faceless people" took him away and confiscated all the remaining letters. And that is how Mendel Osipovich's *Collected Works* were deprived of their fifth volume and his correspondence reduced to twenty notes to publishers and friends. What the terrible "sword of the revolution" failed to destroy was destroyed by the frenzy of love.

What is done is done. The past lives on in us; we cannot blot it out. Since dreams are an image of the otherworld and proof of its existence, we shall meet in dreams: he kneels by the stove, feeding it with damp wood, or calls to me in a hoarse voice. I wake up and switch on the light. Pain and remorse slowly turn into the melancholy joy of memories. Our long, passionate, fearful love has filled my life and given it meaning. Fate has been well disposed toward me, and I seek no reparations. I shall not be in the index of Mendel Osipovich's books or in his biographies or in the footnotes to his poems. I, sir, am the very oeuvre of Mendel Osipovich, and he is mine. Is any fate more to be desired?

Please do not think, sir, that I have "reconciled myself to my lot" and given up. Since no one knows where Mendel Osipovich lies buried, I have no intention of "resting at his side" (as the unfortunate Z. has declared). If the arch-materialist Diderot could be carried away by such fantasies, why shouldn't I too, all materiality aside, hope that we shall meet in the otherworld? And I trust in God I shall not find another shade at his side.

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THE STORY OF THE MASTER AND THE DISCIPLE

What follows took place at the end of the last century in Prague, "city of mysteries." The event—if it can be called such—has been described, with negligible variations and modifications, by many authors, and I shall keep to the version provided by Chaim Frankel—the advantage of his narrative residing in the fact that it recapitulates the views of other disciples who have written about the Master. Once we have set aside its heavy-handed disquisitions on faith, morality, Hasidism, disquisitions interspersed with frequent quotations from the Talmud and Frankel's own quibblings, the story comes down to this:

The learned Ben Haas (born Oskar Leib) began to write poetry, in Hebrew, at the age of fourteen. In about 1890 he returned from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and settled in Prague, where he gathered a group of like-minded scholars around the journal *Ha-Yom,* which was reproduced by hand in as many copies as there were disciples. Ben Haas taught morals and literature. His teachings, set forth in numerous papers and articles and published in part only recently (thanks to the same Chaim Frankel), rest on a moral dilemma that goes back to Plato and may be summarized thus: art and morality are based on two divergent premises and as such are incompatible. One might even claim, with Frankel, that all Ben Haas's oeuvre, poetic as well as philosophical, represents an attempt to overcome this contradiction. He attempts to soften Kierkegaard's "either/or," even though the examples he takes from the history of ideas—from that of literature, primarily—show the dilemma to be virtually insurmountable. "Art is the work of vanity, morality the absence of vanity," he repeats at several points, as he interprets the lives of great men from King David to Judah ha-Levi and Solomon Ibn Gabirol. The circle headed by Ben Haas (some say it had five members, others seven) set itself the goal of refuting the dilemma by word and deed; that is, of submitting "in the very heart of poetic temptation" to a rigorous code of morals which, as Frankel points out, was based on the Judeo-Christian tradition, talmudic postulates, Kant, Spinoza, and Kierkegaard, yet was not devoid of certain "anarchistic elements." If we have understood Frankel correctly, however, the "rigorous moral imperative" (as Ben Haas called

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it) did not exclude certain hedonistic principles from its code: contrary to all expectation, vodka, Indian hemp, and the pleasures of the flesh occupied the same rank as reading, travel, and pilgrimages. All Frankel sees here—and I feel he comes close to the truth—is the low point in the intersection of art and morality where forces clash in their most elemental form, "beyond good and evil": the true moral dilemma begins and ends with the issue of vanity; all else lies beyond the moral sphere. The parallels Frankel draws with Buddhist doctrine and bonze practice—in which the pleasures of the flesh raise no barrier to the absolute known as the *Tao*—would seem to be a consequence more of private speculation on the part of Ben Haas than of the direct influence of Oriental wisdom. The fact that Ben Haas was seen in a disreputable district of Prague at the age of thirty (by which time he had established his moral code once and for all) cannot, therefore, be considered a scandalous contradiction of the principles set forth in his *Summer and the Desert*. "Art is knowledge, and knowledge is asexual," Frankel cites as one of Haas's basic assumptions. "Asexual, that is, amoral." In other words, the learned Ben Haas, who was both poet and moralist, who combined two contradictory vocations, tried to reconcile the asexual knowledge of art, so precious to all experience, with his ethical principles, which he refused to dilute: "If one takes a person at his word, though it be the Sacred Word, one risks a moral fall graver yet than if one breaks a commandment prescribed by the Word." This brief quotation from the early Haas contains the simplest explanation of one of the basic ideas that years later would spawn the heavy, convoluted, barely comprehensible philosophical doctrine he expounded in cabalistic jargon weighed down with neologisms and a number of concepts whose meaning escapes us. Yet we cannot quite agree with Frankel when he states that the obscurity of Ben Haas's later teachings is merely the consequence of doubt, the fruit of "maturity." (There are many obstacles in the way of issuing a critical edition of Ben Haas's complete works, the first being the presence of certain rabbis and moralists on the committee charged with their study and publication.)

Although the event that interests us here and that we mean to relate in brief has no direct connection with Ben Haas's philosophical doctrine; it derives, as insignificant as it may seem, from the nature of his teachings and calls into question an entire complex system of values. This is a sort of moral, if you will.

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In the year 1892, and in that disreputable district of Prague, Ben Haas, who was by then known as the Master, met a young man who asked to have a talk with him. The Master, torn between the ethical and the poetic principle (the former telling him to refuse, the second to consent), sat down with him in a squalid tavern and ordered two glasses of Passover vodka, apparently part of the ritual. Yeshua Krochal, for such was the young man's name, confided to the Master that he had begun to frequent the district since he had picked up one of his writings and read about experience being "asexual, that is, amoral," but that he had been unable to find the spiritual equilibrium preached in *Summer and the Desert*. The Master was overcome with anguish and and remorse when he realized that his teachings, like every doctrine based on morality, were liable in immature hands to cause as much harm as good. (For, as Plato remarks, a master chooses his disciple, but a book does not choose its reader.) Carried away by an infernal impulse and possibly by the vodka as well (if not merely unconsciously wishing to parody Pygmalion, as Frankel would have it), Ben Haas decided to turn an insignificant being—the disciple had not answered a single of the Master's veiled questions—into a Hasid (in the sense of one who is "initiated," "learned," "meek"). The young man confessed that *Summer and the Desert* had given him the moral strength to frequent brothels, since he looked upon the process primarily as an "act of experience," though he was aware of the fact that the "act of experience" was of no value unless it served a creative function. Ben Haas abruptly set his vodka glass down on the table when he heard the title of the book Yeshua Krochal was writing: *The Road to Canaan.* During the course of the evening, however, the man called the Master came to see that his future disciple had all the traits which, had he listened to the voice of reason, would have dissuaded him from taking him under his wing, for stupidity combined with ambition is more dangerous than any insanity. He nonetheless arranged for them to meet in three months' time at the same tavern and left him with a list of twenty-seven books devoted to the miracle at Canaan and salvation.

At the end of November, Yeshua Krochal appeared at the appointed place with his *Road to Canaan,* a manuscript of approximately one hundred and twenty pages, over which the Master cast a fleeting, *all-encompassing* glance, noted the fine penmanship, and picked out several spelling errors at random. He then scheduled

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another meeting, again in three months' time and at the tavern, and sent Yeshua away with a list of books that included a handbook of Hebrew orthography.

On the occasion of their third encounter, in February 1893, the Master leafed through the manuscript with his divining-rod fingers and saw, to his horror, that his suspicions had been well-founded: the spelling error on page 72 had been corrected, but the manuscript was otherwise intact. Driven by a sudden feeling of contrition and, possibly, sympathy (because he realized or at least sensed that by his example he had transformed an unfortunate lay person into a more unfortunate Hasid and that there was no way out, no turning back), the Master picked up the manuscript and went off with it. He spent all that night studying *The Road to Canaan,* whose futility and sterility reminded him of his own error: had he, on that night nine months before, followed his ethical principle instead of his poetic one (though who can tell where the exact border between them lies!), he would not have had on his conscience a futile human existence he was consequently forced by moral law to save from the abyss on whose edge it now stood; and had that once healthy young man not been infected by his teachings, no matter how misinterpreted or misunderstood, he would not have sat up at night over an absurd text written in a large, careful hand, a text informed by a vain desire to justify the absurdity of existence—or the premonition of its absurdity—by a creative act of any sort. In a flash of illumination, Ben Haas apprehended that it was his own vanity that had led him to this pass, his vanity, his poetic eccentricity, and his passion for polemics; that is, a desire to prove to his disciples that the story of Pygmalion lacked the moral force of myth and was merely a common, scandalous anecdote that had been endowed with the illusion of myth.

So as not to reject *The Road to Canaan* out of hand and abandon the unfortunate Yeshua Krochal in a dangerous impasse at the age of thirty-three (Frankel is correct when he discerns in the cryptography the influence of cabalistic symbolism on Ben Haas), the man called the Master purged the manuscript of everything in the image of its author, in the image of his vanity, the only trait holding his frail being together; he excised the ephemeral reflections, as in a stagnant pool, of Yeshua Krochal's pockmarked face, the blue circles under his eyes, his lethargic body; with a nimble pen he rid the manuscript of malicious allusions to contemporary events and of biblical disgressions, such as the one about Lot's wife, in whom he recog-

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nized a redheaded German woman from the Korona Tavern. (The only mysterious links between the redheaded German woman and Lot's wife were the large, white sweat stains circling her armpits and the fact that Yeshua Krochal had, by his own testimony, "sodomized" her.)

Of the hundred and twenty pages in *The Road to Canaan,* Ben Haas left barely a third, bringing together those parts in which a hint of mythic allegory seemed to lurk, a hint that might be turned into the Appearance of Substance. The next day, bleary-eyed and ill-tempered, he set off for the Korona with the manuscript of *The Road to Canaan* in the pocket of his caftan. He found Yeshua Krochal much afflicted. The young man told him of his doubts: he had come to realize the *futility* and the *inevitability* of his choice. If the Master felt that *The Road to Canaan* would fail to attain the grace of appropriate form, he could do nothing but *withdraw.* He pronounced the word in a highly ambiguous manner, in such a way as to give it a different, more pernicious meaning from the one it had in *Summer and the Desert.* ("If you are unable to act at the perilous conjunction of contradictory forces, the moral and the poetic, then withdraw. Water the cabbages in your garden, and grow roses only in the cemetery. For roses are fatal to the soul.") The man called the Master then took the much-defaced manuscript from the inside pocket of his silk caftan and laid it in front of the young man.

"If I understand correctly," said Yeshua, crushed, "there is nothing left."

"Quite the contrary," said Ben Haas. "What is left is what can be given the Appearance of Substance. And the difference between the Appearance of Substance and Substance is so slight that only the wisest can perceive it. As the wise are very few—only thirty-six in the whole world, according to some—very few will notice it. For the vast majority, Appearance equals Substance."

Yeshua Krochal's face lit up, because he thought he had detected a secret idea of his own in the Master's words, his guiding idea: that all things here below happen under false pretenses, on the thin and elusive border separating Substance and the Appearance of Substance, but since no one is able to pinpoint what is one and what the other (here his idea differed fundamentally from the Master's), all values, ethical and poetic, are merely a matter of skill and chance—empty form. Ben Haas sensed his disciple's hidden idea—for the man called the Master did distinguish Truth from False-

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hood—and determined to reveal the boundary between essence and illusion to him. He took him home and, in the course of the night, did his best to explain, with simple yet instructive examples, how an idea, the shadow of an idea, a single image could lead—by the magic of the word and the spell of what cannot be put into words—to the grace of appropriate form.

It was dawn when Yeshua Krochal left the Master's room (in which the strong odor of leather-bound books was leavened by the intoxicating fragrance of sandalwood blasphemously burning in brass menorahs: souvenirs from the Master's pilgrimages). He stopped in at the Korona and ordered goulash and a stein of beer, then set to copying out the manuscript. By noon the complete text of the biblical parable entitled *The Road to Canaan* lay on the table before him, a clean copy in his own oversize penmanship. He took the manuscript containing the Master's emendations and tossed it into the large, tile, cathedral-like stove with its doors to heaven and hell. When the flame had destroyed all trace of the Master's hand and consequently of his own soul, Yeshua Krochal folded the manuscript, slipped it into the inner pocket of his coat, and, burning with a fever till then unnoticed, ordered another stein of beer. Karolina had just set the beer down on the edge of the table when Yeshua leaped up and managed to grab one of her large round breasts. Karolina stood stock-still for a moment, *like Lot's wife transformed into a pillar of salt*, then started and raised her arm abruptly, her heavy red hand grazing his nose.

"This is the Appearance of Substance," said Yeshua sententiously, "while that"—he cupped his hand, his fingers spread wide—"was Substance."

The Road to Canaan appeared at the end of 1894, first in the journal *Ha-Yom* in Hebrew, then, early the next year, translated into German, in book form. The book earned the universal acclaim of the exegetes, all of whom found that it had, as Frankel says, "Substance." Only young Bialik (later known as Chaim Nachman), who subjected the work to a serious analysis, discovered traces of the Master's hand, which "tries to save the parable from the void of which it reeks." Bialik's criticism had the following consequences: in the afterword to the new edition of *The Road to Canaan,* Krochal refers to Bialik as a syphilitic and publicly renounces Ben Haas's teachings, calling him a charlatan and a "poisoner of souls." True to his position, he allied himself with the Master's adversaries and, in a

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new publication called *Kadima,* led a long and merciless battle against him, "using gossip and slander in a manner that showed him to be not entirely without talent." One unfinished parable found among Ben Haas's papers, entitled "The Story of the Master and the Disciple," contains no moral, being incomplete. Except perhaps the following: it is difficult to establish a clear-cut difference, in the moral sense, between Substance and the Appearance of Substance. "Not even the man called the Master always succeeded in doing so," says Frankel. "Leaning over the abyss, not even he could resist the vain pleasure of trying to fill it with Sense." Whence we may derive a new moral, which suggests, as might a proverb, that it is dangerous to lean over someone else's void even if only to gaze, as in the depths of a well, at one's own reflection, for that, too, is vanity. Vanity of vanities.

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POEMS

Zbigniew Herbert

LANDSCAPE

It is a windy night and an empty road where the army of the
Prince of Parma
has left dead bodies of horses
bones of a recently captured castle shine on a bald mountain
there is only stone sand dung and wind with no aim or color

What animates the landscape is a moon sharply nailed into the sky
and a few dirty shadows below
also white gallows for on them the thin husks of bodies
are hanging the wind brings them back to life wind without trees
and without clouds

THE NEPENTHE FAMILY

Did Jean-Jacques the Tender know about the pitcherplant
—it was described by Linnaeus he should have known it—
so why was he silent about this scandal of nature

one of many scandals but perhaps
beyond the capacity of the heart and tear-glands
of the one who sought only comfort in nature

this criminal grows in the dark jungles of Borneo
and lures with a flower that is not a flower
but the main vein of a leaf fanned out in the form of a
pitcher

with a hinged lid and very sweet mouth
that draws insects to the treacherous banquet
like the secret police of a certain empire

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for who can resist—fly or man—
the sticky nectars orgy of colors glowing with hues
of white of violet of meat like the windows of a red tavern

where a kind inn-keeper with a beautiful daughter wife
sends the company of drunken guests drained of blood
to heaven or hell depending on their merits

it was a favorite of the Victorian decadents
combining the salon of debauchery with the torture chamber
everything was there—rope nails venom sex the knout the
coffin

and we live peacefully with the pitcher plant
among gulags concentration camps with no concern for
the knowledge
that innocence in the world of plants—does not exist

Translated from the Polish by Bogdana and John Carpenter

Abraham Sutzkevor

THE KISS

The Wonder happened so naturally:
a poet submerged in a sea—seeking
pearls, shivering and yearning motionlessly.
And with the slightest kiss for the first pearl,
his limbs disappeared,
his face ceased to exist—
no tears—
the poet entered his poems.

Translated from the Yiddish by Murray Wolfe

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Ernst Herbeck

THE SWORD

For you dear Heij sacred sword.
with willing deep pillored.
with the old testament.
armoured the sword on self.
but no it won't go further.
than up to into me.

Translated from the German by Melissa Monroe

Aleksandr Kushner

UNTITLED

In the morning, the drafts in the blinds and the curtains
occupy themselves sculpting quick busts and live torsos.
How they rustle and clap! And I love their exertions,
their world piled with uranids or bulged like Colossus.

First a knee—then a shoulder, imprisoned in linen,
pushes out; they stamp and shove in hopes of escaping
from the cloth of that jail, but they'll fail to get in and
see the room, too weak to rip the light pleated draperies.

World of giants! Angered by their blinded condition,
they are doomed to swell up all morning with blisters;
first they sag, then rise back to a kneeling position,
stuck to doorknobs or catching the edges of pictures.

It's like Pergamum's altar, with air for a lining!
No one needs to climb to the quarry for marble.
They will battle all morning; now one is sent flying,
grabs another, they tumble. Remember this marvel.

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The whole morning, while you're lying in bed, feeling lethargic,
after night healed the stings that had left you embarrassed,
Titans, rounded and crowded like columns, still argue
in the curtains, and struggle—and finally perish.

UNTITLED

We don't get to choose our century,
and we exit after entering.
Nothing on this earth is cruder
than to beg for time or blame
the hour. No marketplace maneuver
can achieve a birth's exchange.

Though all ages are the iron age,
lovely gardens steam and varnished
cloudlets sparkle. I, when five,
should have died of scarlet fever:
live, avoiding grief and evil;
see how long you can survive.

Looking forward to good fortune?
Hoping for a better portion
than the Terrible's grim reign?
Leprosy and plagues in Florence
aren't your dream? The hold's dark storage
doesn't suit your first-class aims?

Though all ages are the iron age,
lovely gardens steam and varnished
cloudlets sparkle. I embrace
my age and its fated ending.
Time is an ordeal, and envying
anyone is out of place.

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I embrace it firmly, knowing
time is flesh instead of clothing.
Deep in us its seal is set,
as if fingerprints were signals
of an age's lines and wrinkles.
In our hands our time is read.

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

Off one of Moscow's smaller streets
that a snow-storm had covered,
we saw the cradle's tiny sheets;
like magi we leaned over.

And something gleamed, as if the child
were swathed in a faint halo;
bottles and plates of food were piled
in offering on the table.

In the half-dark we looked around
and then once more bent forward,
dreaming a cow and calf lay down
and eyed us from the corner.

—A scene like Hugo van der Goes
would draw: a beaded necklace
decks the housewife; the magi muse
while through the door light trickles.

And we were filled with such a sense
of peace, that as we shared it,
we could not fear the violence
or threats of any Herod.

The world's whole horror, from day one
to now, stood at a distance;
as if under a spell, it hung
and yielded for an instant.

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Volkhonka suburb then became
as aged as the Bible,
and light snow on the windowpane
welcomed a child's arrival.

It gathered us from where we live;
through street and park we stumbled,
following, as we always have,
a miracle so simple.

Translated from the Russian by Paul Graves

Saúl Yurkievich

OFF TO NEVERNEVER LAND

he is an intellectual
would like to be one
working as a mercenary (by day)
therefore therefrom thereupon
he rhymes advertising jingles
paraphrases anachronical chronicles
in yellow newspapers
or he ends up
a third official
in the general administration of the waterworks
where he sails
simulating gentlemanly imperturbability
so then in any case inasmuchas
(feeding on the public treasury)
he seems to be an obedient citizen
with no visible infractions
at last as a result as a consequence
shows himself coincidentally
in appearance at least
respectful of the civil
code

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inoffensive of proper aspect
short hair neat part
dark suit modest tie
elegant manners allow me
I beg you
at the feet of his lady
expressions from the civil rulebook
attentively
your faithful servant
formulates formal formulas
has the great pleasure
serious as a camel
who knows in every case
the title required
esteemed señor don
(our amanuensis)
sets up household with a housewife
acquisitive woman
with children in school
who admire the champ
although nevertheless
although nevertheless however
our keeper of the black necrological
registry takes cover at night in his room
to fly away to nevernever land
yes
to dream himself great
exonerated
to become zarathustra and el cid
to go galloping through pages
adventuring pen at the ready
menacing
miracle worker
moor killer
through nevernever land

Translated from the Spanish by Cola Franzen

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Benjamin Fondane

FROM: ULYSSES

I have put into port in cities
with companions whose names I did not know
opened myself to faces whose expressions,
from within, filled my flesh with wonder
—flesh, this city was of flesh, of skin,
set in motion by living transmission belts
it washed its old cathedrals, its ancient cobblestones,
its time like dirtied linen;
it cried its glory:

O, I've spat on History,
hungered in Seville for a real Senorita
lean as a meal on Ash Wednesday;
she sold canaries.
At Cadix, I dreamed of the dawns of Paris.
I've cursed, in Dakar, the white homelands,
Called to myself sand, sleep . . .
My heart was so cowardly and so weak:
—Almeria, you reeked of garlic . . .

Everywhere people seated in cafés: the banks.
We spoke their language as little as possible,
spent time in old churches where Jesus Christ,
painted, nailed to the wall, let out his cry!
The time for prayers, already passed,
old the cry, all beauty so old;
there was nothing alive but blood,
the blood that ran black from gutted horses,
and in those slaughterhouses,
a dull emotion that took shape in the mouth:
"Come in gentlemen, witness the marvelous and horrible
side-show!"

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Oh, what had I come to do in this crowded forest?
I'd searched for a little silence in certain terms,
a little sun less exhausting than snow;
the woman with the heavy womb crossed my blood,
life, life burst out everywhere with greater vigor
I was born in Jassy, what did I search for in Oran
(in the windows of beauty parlors, beautiful women?)
my voyage finished, my past abolished,
where will my steps carry me? to what climes?
What human faces will call to me?
What super-human exhaustions?
I cannot listen to so many voices all at the same time.
Who speaks? What did I say? Who, who is it that hears?
Enough, enough, I say to you,
the weight of my body burdens me more than God,
I can no longer struggle against winds, against tides,
Can no longer walk; the roads are barred
—enough!

Translated from the French by
Leonard Schwartz and E. M. Cioran

Henry J. M. Levet

OUTWARDS

to Francis Jammes

The Armand Behic (of the Maritime Freight)
Speeds along at fourteen knots over the Indian Ocean
The sun sets in a jelly of crimes,
On this sea flattened as though by hand.

Miss Roseway, who is returning to Adelaide,
Towards Home Sweet Home and her Australian fiancé,
Miss Roseway, alas, who has no cure for my ennui;
Her lorgnette fixed on the Laquedives, so far away . . .

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—I go to get myself ready—without joy!—for tonight's
Party: on the bridge, lanterns, dances, ballads,
(I must accompany Miss Roseway who asks

—Very gently—after the families of shipwrecked
Sailors!). Oh, that in a slow waltz, her back
In my right arm, I might sweep her away without violence

To a deserted isle where God would recognize his own . . .

HOMEWARDS

to M. P. Bons d'Anty

At the Waterloo Hotel, I have had my snack,
And, my bill paid, I steer myself toward the wharf.
Here is the *Indus* (of the Maritime Freight)
And the idiotic sorrow of "homewards."

—Some French officers returning from Indochina
To spend a leave of six months in Europe,
Comment on the boarding of young misses, sufficiently divine,
With whom I will certainly never flirt!

On the bridge my future traveling companions
Size me up . . .
Then we undergo a summary health inspection—

(This year the plague has caused considerable ravages!)
—Finally there is the bell for departure.
And so I bring home, piously wadded,

The flower of my Anglo-Saxon melancholy . . .

Translated from the French by Kirby Olson

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Max Jacob

CHRIST AT THE MOVIES

"When you're eating fruit, child, spit the seeds out,
Or in your little belly a whole tree will sprout,"
They said in my house when I was a boy.
That set me on the wrong track for sure:
Branches in the navel mean fruit all the more.
A tree all my own which no one takes away,
Whose fruit, no sooner eaten, grows back every day!

I have my tree today: my tree is the Cross;
Faith is its gift to my greediness.
Dryad of the gallows, when I summon you, come:
Rescue my life from its cruel humdrum.
Dryad of the gallows, descend like yesterday
Evening at the movies when you sat by me
So close. Your hand! Put your hand upon mine
And your so-human warmth and your breath divine.
Oh! I was sick and tired from thinking too much.
Let my body fold upon yours at your touch.
And you! You deigned, as your shoulder hid my eyes,
To describe the movie and sort out the lines.
We had the cheapest seats, at ninety-five centimes;
You spoke of charity before those murky crimes
The Parisian wants every night for dessert.
Today, I'm alone. Lord, groping at my side
My eager fingers feel only the void.
Without you, my God, the world is blank, inert.
The eyes of my spirit sketch your body still,
But it's mere imagination, an act of the will.
—When I go lug my spleen through Montparnasse
Do you want me to save a place in the cafés
For this body you give so generously
To the humblest, most useless, of servants: to me?
That idiot movie! Now I find it blessed
Since you deigned, so my faith would be redressed,
To sit at my side amidst your people there.
A movie seat held you! It is a holy chair!

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They call me crazy! Yes! I hear the reader now—
Or blasphemous, you scold with furrowed brow.
Madmen yourselves, if truth can make you laugh.
The Lord is everywhere, and with the worst riffraff.
To feel God in oneself, to hear Him, to reply,
Whether at the movies, in the street, at a café,
This common miracle shouldn't start a fuss:
Out of church, God's everywhere, and speaks with us.
My madness, if I'm mad, is of a different brand.
Listen: I've seen Him! Twice, close at hand:
It was October seven, rue Ravignan, in my room—
No! I wasn't drunk, nor in delirium—
In the year nineteen-nine, October seven;
I take you as witness, Lord, who put new leaven
Into me, sinning lump of filthiness;
You know what sins had seized me in their fists,
What hell I lived in, what a squalid mess,
What resolutions you raised up like yeast
In this Christian whom, thanks to you and the good priests,
I've become, endowed with sense and reason.
So, the first time, you appeared in my room.
And the second time it was at a film.
"You go to the movies, then?" with dumbfounded air
Demanded my confessor.—Yes, Father,
What if I did? Didn't Our Lord come there?"

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"The Gang in the Black Suits," thriller by Paul Féval;
The plot's in my heart and not on the screen.
The cops and mounties close round and corral
A thief in dire straits: a sudden sheen
Spreads through the crowd, my eyes fill with tears!
The sheen is a halo, in its light, God appears.
To me, this gift! Why did you choose to meet
me here? In this movie on a little side street
The drapes of a taper-white mantle enfold
My concierge's four urchins you once told
Me to care for. Can the human soul
Hide no scrap from your eyes, must it be seen whole?
Is there for your vision no mystery in our heart?
Do you penetrate all beings in every part?
Then why? Why this grace
If you know my life in all its ugliness?
If you know my faults and my weaknesses too?
What in me, Oh Lord, could interest you?

Translated from the French by Rosanna Warren

Odysseus Elytis

THE ALMOND OF THE WORLD

I.What happens when
there's lightning in memory's far land
and scenes yet to happen are reflected
in some unsuspected time

a little girl running
at the shore's very edge
to lift the sea's tablecloth (Dali)

and another girl behind her hoop
on a long melancholy road (de Chirico)

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a third half-reclining on a sofa
with open limbs (Balthus)

the almond of the world
is deeply hidden
and still unbitten

a myriad possibilities shudder
around us which we idiots wouldn't
even touch

we never understood how pigeons think
two hand-spans above our head
what we have lost already is in play

before this body
that I am existed
a sea came first
full of little white rolling
vowels rattling: alpha epsilon iota

you'd say that even then
in the posture I had before descending into the Mother
I was shouting with all my might
aei aei aei
ever ever ever

but no one was ever willing to believe me.

II. Ah yes despite my will
the world was made so that
I write as though I were separated from my fate

the almond of the world
is bitter and there's no way
you can find it unless
you sleep half outside of sleep

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the houses are magnified
terrible women as far from their
loosened hair as thunder from its flash
go portioning out the sky's
mists here and there
the holes
lead death astray

at night
when I speak as if to stir up constellations
in the upper embers for a moment the face
is formed that God
would give me if he knew
how much earth in truth cost me
in desperation
in "it was destined" whispered variously at night
in cypresses
centuries old like poems
during whose making I was disrealized.

III. Come now
even if you're not liked
what counts is your course
against this society
against inhibiting idiocy
curly hair that gives off sparks
soon as you comb it

miracle

come forward my second and hidden
self it's time
you uttered with awe the words
that suit the situation
especially the beautiful and prohibited

poetry

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where oh where then
does such a glow develop into fruit
something surely
must surreptitiously have been subtracted
from the terraqueous globe
for it to pant so
to turn pale
and for mourning to spread itself

utterly in vain
the almond of the world
throbs amid the foliage
of Paradise by default
I too throb amid the words that in ignorance I subtract
from some perfect achievement
until finally all that's left for me
are two or three standing columns
and on the walls a fresco
let's say Creto-Minoan (if in the meantime
they haven't effaced
the seas and those lovely barebreasted women)
some lilies are still preserved
inconceivable to my contemporaries
even as these verses:

a total eclipse
the moment that everyone's asleep in the Observatory.

IV. Even if you have it all
something's always lacking
it's enough the Integral is not accomplished
and Fortune feel more fortunate

at night when hostile eyes appear
in the same place like stars
shadows are described as they descend
one by one to Hades
like those blacks on the sides of an ancient vessel
borne by stooping virgins

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it's necessary
for us to be mindful of the most fearsome goodness ever given
by one man to another
love
resembles two glasses at a moment of enthusiasm
ding
flash
shatterings

remember Maria Alcaforado
and Noël Bouton de Chamilly
Jettchen and Heinrich von Kleist
our friend Vladimir and the famous Lily

goddamn it
it happened that we always sought
precisely that which cannot be

high in some heavenly Aetnas some mountainous seas
at the distance of a deserted soul
there flourishes yet it seems

the almond of the world.

go on my tear go on
take the heavenly roads
this vigil is for you.

V. (One more cigarette
which lasts till we expire
for two or three minutes of life
with really superb moments
courtyards where we incomprehensibly grew up

and you bitter one who made it your obstinate purpose
to find and pick—think of it—*the almond of the world*
but just your hand remained
to write some white
poems on the black page

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who ever understood
the dusks that you endured trying not to weep?
there is a traitor within you
whose time for punishment will come

O friends

if one of us sinned
it must be God

good for him
we sought and sought as much as possible
to be upright men
on a terrace above the sea
look:
the stars break one by one
even your cigarette's last little light goes out
and is finished
stamp it out
goodbye.)

VI. My God
if sometimes truth becomes
music that eats matter
I must be a liar but more credible
than all beings
buzzing on the planet
listen
man is as if coming from elsewhere
and so he sounds out of tune
with a memory all fragmented but
reserved toward miracles

maybe I'm wrong maybe it's because
I don't know reading and writing
all alone

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I am hanging
since Herakleitos' time
like *the almond of the world*
from a branch of the North Aegean
an ancient fisherman with his trident
who has known many gales until there:
sometime the moment arrives

the waters around his become
brilliant
chilly
rosy
he squints his eyelids
it's because the reflection
all absolute beauty
shows with whom it briefly had no intention on his part
a confidential meeting.

VII.

Come on then
forget me if you dare

the lizards on monuments ignore both sculptors and architects

three in the morning
it's as if I had been born years after
men were distinguished at wrestling and commerce

axiomatically I am living beyond the point where I find myself
besides
continuing along my mother
you will meet me even after death

(the point is not to act badly otherwise
in the clouds there appears—like the sugar of a diabetic
urinating

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on a paper slip—
a black riding horse with one foot forward:
vainglory
whose inside is unattainable)
where? who? when?
seek and ye shall find
little Lady Huntress
who abducts *the almond of the world*
high to the mountains and soars
to an age genuinely golden

truly

no money at all exists there

life is perceived as something immeasurable

I stand and regard the waves
nothing more perfect more unadmitting of decay
has ever existed.

Translated from the Greek by Jeffrey Carson and Nikos Sarris

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Karen Wilkin

AT THE GALLERIES

In the last decade, painting has turned itself inside out. From the Renaissance to the nineteenth century, painters strove to dissolve the flat planes of walls and panels and canvases to create potent illusions of space and depth. After the Impressionists, and especially after Cézanne, the plane declared itself more frankly; Renaissance perspective was more or less reversed as painted forms appeared to press forward into the viewer's space. More recently, the unavoidable flat surface of the canvas has often been made into a virtue, a significant element in stripped-down abstraction, but since about 1980, painters seem to have yearned for tangible physical substance, not just declarative flatness. From Frank Stella's aggressive painted reliefs to the literal-minded inclusions of David Salle and company, we are surrounded by works where actual projection is of paramount importance. It's enough to make you believe in a zeitgeist.

Even artists whose work defined the pristine, uninflected character of painting in the sixties and seventies have been affected by the new desire for tactility. Lawrence Poons, for example, first attracted attention with his meticulously painted "dot" pictures of the 1960s, luminous fields punctuated by unpredictably placed spots of color. About 1970, he began to pour or, more accurately, to "throw" his paintings, to make complex orchestrations of colored rivulets. Since about 1980, Poons's work has become more and more robust and, at the same time, more and more visually elusive, as his lyrical waterfalls of color have been made to fight it out with richly articulated surfaces. His most recent work, the tough, uningratiating and beautiful canvases shown last September at the André Emmerich Gallery, made him seem (among other things) like the quintesentially 1980s painter. Of course, it's not simply a question of surface. Poons's new pictures are disquieting even when they are most seductive, hard to pin down, a little unstable, "dislocated" in the way eighties art is said to be. (They are hard paintings to write about. Because the experience is so intensely visual, which is not to say mindless, language seems even more inadequate than usual). As they have been since the 1970s, Poons's new paintings are continuous modulated expanses of similarly valued colors, but where the

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earlier works were straightforward and tender, those of the last few years are more willful. The thrown canvases were expressive of the "paintness" of paint, its ability to flow, to respond to gravity, to mutate when color meets color. Poons's newest work deliberately disrupts these properties. His pale color is imposed on complex surfaces made by collaging crumpled or rolled paper, polyester batting, foam and the like, so that paint seems less a liquid than it does something trapped, transfixed, suspended. When collaged elements read too clearly as discrete applied shapes, the pictures can look too composed or too crafted, but when Poons gets it right, as in the marvelous *Brahms in Rio*, edges and crumples function as a kind of sculptural drawing in a sea of insubstantial color. Shifts of tone and hue work with and against the articulated surface, intensifying and cancelling actual hollows and ridges.

Color, in most of the recent works, is blonde and light-struck. Poons's Impressionist palette verges on sweetness, but the gritty, all-but-ugly surfaces counteract his slightly cosmetic hues. At the same time, the delicate colors dissolve surface incrustations, rendering these intensely physical paintings insubstantial. Mass is made literal, by the collaged elements, and then abstracted into a purely visual phenomenon. The dramatic inflections of Poons's paintings of the last decade anticipate (and criticize) much literally all-inclusive painting—Schnabel's crockery-studded canvases, for example—but they are made in a very different spirit. Poons's inclusions are there not for irony but to make his paintings more present, not to subvert their painted context but to heighten its expressiveness. There's none of the cynicism or detachment of many of his younger colleagues.

Poons keeps faith with the tradition of modernism and its belief in a kind of Platonic ideal, but with an edge. He keeps his viewers off-balance. You are convinced that if you were only to look hard enough, the logic of making, the sequence of color would reveal itself in Poons's recent work. It doesn't. You seize on a small incident—a cluster of collaged knobs or a particular patch of color—as a point of reference. It doesn't help. You are swept away by the forceful current of the whole. The best pictures refuse to yield to logical analysis or, in present-day jargon, to "explication." (Quite the contrary, when structure is too apparent, the paintings suffer). Yet though they appear to have been generated by inevitable and unstoppable forces, Poons's pictures are equally informed by uncompromising visual intelligence and visual intuition. As real as chunks of the natural world, they also are evidently the stuff of artifice; the

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paperiness and syntheticness of Poons's materials are made to count, paradoxically, for aesthetic reasons.

Poons's detractors sometimes cite the geometric clarity of his dot paintings (which they generally regard as his best work) as evidence of greater thoughtfulness and control than are visible in his recent paintings. But the underlying orderliness and perhaps even the impulse of the dot pictures persist, in buried form, in even the wildest of his recent works. *Brahms in Rio* develops in a sequence as rhythmic as the facade of any classical temple, for all the apparent irrationality of its elusive color relationships. Poons treads the boundary between art and chaos. When he succeeds, his pictures hit like a slam to the solar plexus.

A similar spirit is evident in the work of Katja Jacobs, a German-born painter new to New York, who has a distinguished exhibition history in Europe and Canada, where she has lived since the mid-sixties. Jacobs's crusty abstract paintings were seen at 49th Parallel, the Center for Canadian Contemporary Art, last October. She is evidently an admirer of Pollock and of all-overness, but her paintings soon declare themselves as anything but derivative. They are quirky, individual and original. Like Poons, whom she knows and whose work obviously interests her, Jacobs interrupts her surfaces with collaged elements. The result, however, is not one of uniform inflection, but of staccato accretion. I suspect that Jacobs's fascination with collage originates in sources different from those of many of her colleagues. She was trained first as a printmaker, and something of the character of the excavated, uneven printing plate seems to have found its way into her paintings.

Jacobs's pictures call up associations with unknown alphabets, illegible calligraphy, tribal patterning. Their layers of paint and applied elements evoke both archaeology and the accumulations and random associations of the modern-day city, both the palimpsests of antiquity and the walls where generations of posters and graffiti have left their mark. That Jacobs's work reads, at first, as all-over painting probably owes more to color than to structure. Each canvas or diptych has a single dominant hue—an odd gray-black or ochre, for example—that unifies what is, in fact, a series of irregularly placed "events." These images, redolent of tribal and primitive art, are partly the result of drawing, partly of collaging, and partly of the way paint spatters and flows. They are never imposed on the ground but instead seem to emerge from it, to coalesce momentarily and then to subside into a fluctuating space, like participants appearing

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and disappearing during some arcane ritual. Jacobs's paintings are mysterious and gritty. They give the lie to one of her countrymen's assertion that Canadians prefer "reason over passion."

Across the street from the Jacobs exhibition, Ross Bleckner showed recent work at the Mary Boone Gallery during October and November. Bleckner's work is further evidence of the pervasiveness of the articulated surface and, alas, of the pervasiveness of what I can call only cynicism in current painting. The deep, uniform tones of his vertical canvases were interrupted by jewel-like spots of color that ranged from transparent wiped patches to thick clumps of pigment, with sleek, shiny passages in between. Almost hidden among these incidents, you discovered a tiny hand, like the hand of God in Northern Renaissance paintings, or a *fleur de lis*, or ghostly birds. (Some said they were angels).

I kept having testy conversations with young artists who found the Bleckners exciting and new. They claimed that the tiny images, which I found silly, were the *point*, signifying, I was told, Bleckner's ironic detachment, his downright subversion of the kind of abstraction that his paintings superficially resemble. What then was I to make of the large gray picture, all blobs and knobs arranged in concentric rings, mercifully free of angels or hummingbirds, that managed to be the best picture in the show? Bleckner fans told me, too, that they admired his surfaces. I'll grant that he can put paint through its paces, but there is something flashy and a little tawdry about Bleckner's star-spangled canvases; rather than connoting opulence, they seem merely slick. (The gray picture suffered less from this, its paint more legible as paint than as glitz). The problem with Bleckner's virtuoso paint handling, curiously, is his evident disdain for his medium. His imagery provides the clue, and finally, it is his imagery that troubles me most. Bleckner doesn't trust the ability of his medium to be expressive nor does he trust the ability of his viewers to read his pictures. He insists on spelling out a single meaning for his audience, leaving nothing to chance or to ambiguity. I was reminded of a dance performance I had seen last season, a piece that seemed directly motivated by the choreographer's choice of music and open to a wide range of interpretations. The dancer's movements were apparently spontaneous (although obviously set), suggestive, ambiguous—until the last moment, when he resolved a series of feints from one side of the stage to the other as a shrug. What had seemed provocative, seconds before, became a literal-minded pantomime of indecision. The mood of the dance changed

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completely; the meaning of what had come before was called into question. The dance became obvious and trivial.

A lack of confidence in the potency of materials plagues a great deal of recent art. Bleckner is not alone in wanting to hammer his audience with "meaning." But faith in the expressive powers of one's medium is no guarantee of success, either. The Jannis Kounnellis sculpture exhibition that preceeded the Bleckner exhibit at the Mary Boone Gallery was a textbook demonstration of the failure of ordinary objects to transcend their previous existence, no matter how carefully chosen or how elegantly displayed. The gallery's walls were lined with a series of virtually identical constructions, symmetrically organized assemblages of large steel plates, vertical beams, bags of dirt, and rocks of more or less uniform sizes. The structures were evidently heavy, perilously balanced, and adjusted with effort. You marvelled at the mechanics of the undertaking. How had Kounnellis managed to hold the six mini-boulders in place on each of the plates? Would the bags of dirt slip? How were they held on the wall?

Beyond this kind of sideshow curiosity, the sculptures yielded very little. I had expected more of Kounnellis, whose work usually has a spare elegance and a visual impact that overwhelms the anecdotes of its making. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the history of a sculpture's making usually seems inseparable from its visual qualities; the smoke smudges from the flame of a welding torch used in assembling a piece become drawn elements on the wall that supports it, for example. When Kounnellis's work is most successful, the tension between his sturdy industrial materials and the implied impermanence of elements like smoke smudges becomes arresting, enriching. The installation at Mary Boone produced another sort of tension, this time debilitating. Kounnellis's constructions had a superficial appearance of having been scavenged. They seemed to draw upon discarded, brutal stuff, impolite and perhaps a little bit dangerous. Yet it was mere appearance. Longer inspection made the sculptures look increasingly elegant and precious. Their air of streetwise toughness was all style; roughness had been turned into an expensive, sanitized commodity.

James Wolfe's ribbony steel constructions, painted in cool neutral tones, were, ironically, far less commercial-looking than Kounnellis's corporate *art brut*. The witty sculptures Wolfe showed at the André Emmerich Gallery in September owe something to González, but in general they are less overtly about the figure and less delicate in scale than the work of the Catalan master. For once, the

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cliché of describing slender metal sculpture as "drawing in space" seems apt. Unlike his earlier works, which were relatively massive and usually hugged the ground, Wolfe's sculpture of the past five years or so has been increasingly delicate, linear and upright. Squiggles and whorls of steel, in the recent works, gather themselves up off the ground or, surprisingly, seem to be magically suspended from some unknown point. Elements that, in fact, support often seem to hang rather than to stand erect; the effect is something like that of a flying buttress on a Gothic cathedral, a structure that always appears to spring upward even though its function is to transfer weight to the ground.

What was most striking and newest in Wolfe's September exhibition was the comparative simplicity of the sculptures. They were clearer and less complicated than in the past, the drawing less "sketchy." Each "stroke," whether a wiry curl or a flat, curving bar had its own distinct character, while bulky geometric elements and larger-scale "lines" provided welcome counterpoint to the more flamboyant twirls and spirals. For all their abstractness, the best of Wolfe's pieces were animated in ways that suggested reclining figures or, at least, the movement of reclining—stretching out, propping up and so on—without being particularly *like* anything recognizeable. Generally, the midsized pieces were most successful, since their component parts were relatively large in relation to the amount of space between them. (Wolfe's large sculptures can risk attenuation, when drawing appears too thin, another reason that his new incorporation of broader bars and robust chunks improves them). Having said this, however, I must point out *Sea Steps*, one of the largest sculptures in the exhibition, with its staggered upward path of blocks and coils, was one of the best.

Wolfe is certainly not the only sculptor to aspire to polychromy. Vividly painted sculpture is almost the rule these days, perhaps in retaliation for painters' having appropriated surface inflection, but the notion has absorbed modernist sculptors since the first Cubist constructions. David Smith spoke of merging painting and sculpture into a new art form that would "beat either one." Wolfe may not have fulfilled Smith's fantasy, but he is one of the few who is able to make color shifts enhance three-dimensional form. *Sea Steps*, for example, is inconceivable without its range of warm and cool grays, its punctuating notes of black, blue and green that distance like elements from one another and unify unlike ones. When Wolfe succumbs to dramatic contrasts of—say—matte black, cream and

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shiny red in a single sculpture, there's danger of the piece becoming too graphic or, worse, splitting apart, but most of the time he stays within a narrower spectrum, as in *Sea Steps*. His polychromy is most effective when least visible, when you are uncertain whether a color shift is the result of a change in hue or a change in plane. Nonetheless, there's something playful about Wolfe's color, as there is about his sculptures. You could describe them as immensely elegant toys for immensely sophisticated children without belittling them in any way. In the end, Wolfe's wit and apparent lightheartedness are what sets his sculptures apart.

I suppose a similar description could serve for Rebecca Horn's installation, *Art Circus*, at the Marian Goodman Gallery in October, but lightheartedness was conspicuously absent. I went to the exhibition with high expectations. I've liked Horn's films in the past, and I had recently seen an installation in a group show in Toronto that had fascinated me. Horn had placed two of her typical "machines" in a square, stone tower room in a spectacular hillside water-processing plant above Lake Ontario. The piece transformed her obsession with birds and painting machines into images at once charming and threatening. Wings made of brushes in drying racks flapped hopelessly against a tall arched window, while a group of small canvases cascaded down the honey-colored stone wall, splattered from above with cerulean blue paint. The blue of the distant lake, visible through the windows, the waterfall of blue canvases, the blue spatters on the floor all reinforced one another; the brush-bird transformed the mechanical brushes of the painting machine into something desperate and slightly sinister.

Two similar works formed part of the complex at Marian Goodman's, but they were oddly inexpressive. They seemed flimsy and trite in the pristine gallery, more evocative of Tinguely—and suffering from the comparison—than of circus or performance. Nor were the other elements more satisfying. A machine that made two giant staghorn beetles appear to fight was more fascinating for the shape of its beautifully made, ingenious gears than for anything else, while the whipping machine—presumably meant to suggest the ringmaster—was simply nasty.

Only the center construction seemed possessed of the uncanny life of its own that I expected from Horn's inventions, so much so that it soundly criticized the rest of the grouping. A gleaming steel pointer, alternately rising and falling as it revolved, solemnly described the circus ring. At intervals, the pointer was frozen, but

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when it moved (propelled by an exquisite motor that Horn has used in other pieces), the pointer barely missed a series of vertical constructions set at the edges of a circle described on the floor. These demonstrated Horn's familiar vocabulary: a precariously balanced egg, dry and wet pigments, mechanical parts, brushes turned into metaphors for bird crests and so on. As presented, they were as evocative of the studio, the factory and the alchemist's laboratory as of the circus. The pointer revolved, like a mechanical child playing a counting game, extending a long, menacing finger at Horn's allusive constructions. Nothing else in the exhibition approximated the power of the center "figure," nor did the various parts coalesce into a whole. I haven't given up on Horn, but I expect more of her.

My enthusiasm for contemporary painting and sculpture notwithstanding, the most challenging show I saw this fall was *Cézanne: The Early Years 1859–1872*. Selected by Lawrence Gowing, the exhibition originated in London, at the Royal Academy. It has been at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris and will come to the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. early this year. It's a difficult, uncomfortable show, a document of struggle, confusion and intense feeling. That Cézanne ever became "Cézanne" as we know and revere him seems miraculous once you know the full range of his first efforts.

Cézanne was twenty-one when he began the rigid, amateurish *Four Seasons*, the panels in the collection of the Petit Palais, with their elongated female figures that recall Puvis de Chavannes and Goya's tapestry cartoons. Twelve years later, he was capable of constructing a dispassionate self-portrait with carefully placed planes of warm and cool color. In between there are straightforward landscapes, lurid bacchanals, studies saved from academicism by their ferocity, and a series of brutal portraits of his family and friends. They include the well-known painting of his father reading a newspaper in a flowered armchair and the various images of his lawyer uncle, Dominique, with their slabs of thick, dragged paint. It's an erratic, confusing group, signposts along the young Cézanne's uneasy, indirect path towards his own art.

Gowing's sensitively chosen selection raises more questions than it answers, and that constitutes a great deal of the show's fascination. I'd always assumed, for instance, that the clunkiness of the portraits of Uncle Dominique, like the maladroitness of the bacchanals, came from a lack of conventional facility. But several works in Gowing's exhibit make it plain that Cézanne could paint quite skillfully, if pressed. Clearly the left-handedness of the early works that we know best must have been deliberate, part of Cézanne's

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lifelong quest for intensity, for painted images that provoked the same powerful sensations as the artist's sensations in the face of actuality, for what a British sculptor friend calls "making a work of art REAL." Seeing so many of the early pictures suggested unexpected connections, as well as unexpected interpretations. I kept thinking of the Black Goyas. Did Cézanne know them? What did he think of El Greco?

It is obvious, given the values of the current art world, why this would be the moment to examine Cézanne in his most obviously passionate, ham-fisted phase. Happily, the catalogue essays, by Gowing and other scholars, with an introduction by John Rewald, are informative, perceptive and free of art world politics, but there is nonetheless the lingering feeling that work of this period would have been received less enthusiastically a decade ago. It comes as no surprise, though, to see how extravagant Cézanne's early work was. The same pounding emotion is present, just below the surface, in even the driest of his mature paintings, detached from explicit reference, transformed into scrutiny and disguised as scrupulous modulation of tones. Seeing *The Early Years* makes you admire all the more the intelligence that allowed Cézanne to channel that emotion, to subsume it with formal considerations, to the enduring benefit of his art. Self-indulgent young painters can learn a lot from Cézanne's example. They can learn even more from the details of his twelve-year fight with his own abilities and weaknesses. A gifted French sculpture, with whom I saw the exhibition, summed it up nicely as we left. "My god," he said, "what it takes to make an artist!"

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Dominique Aubert (*Uncle Dominic*) by Paul Cézanne. Oil on canvas. 79.7 × 64.1 cm. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Wolfe Fund, 1951, from the Museum of Modern Art, Lillie P. Bliss Collection.

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BOOKS

NEW DIRECTIONS

THE IMMORTAL BARTFUSS. By Aharon Appelfeld. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. $15.95.
THE FIFTH CHILD. By Doris Lessing. Alfred A. Knopf. $16.95.

Despite their significant difference, these two novels—really novellas, that favored form of Henry James—by Doris Lessing and Aaron Appelfeld have some striking things in common. Both are little gems. Both have themes spun out of fantasies grounded in reality. Both have symbolic meanings hovering in the background. Both are minimalist in execution, not in subject; just the reverse of much recent American fiction.

Lessing's new short novel reminds one a bit of Jane Austen but with a Mary Shelley twist, as it weaves a modern version of a family life, partly within, but mostly outside of, the emancipated anti-family norms of the sexual liberation that reached its height in the pseudo-revolutionary lifestyles of the sixties. *The Fifth Child* is a harrowing, out-of-this-world tale of a very ordinary couple, nurturing a seemingly normal, middle-class existence, bringing up a large family in a big suburban house—big enough to be filled up by their relatives on vacations and holidays. Except for the fanatic intensity of the couple's belief in a children's crusade, that is, to populate the house with babies, they start their lives away from big-city depravities in a fairly humdrum fashion. Child follows child in a glow of happiness that wears down the commuting father and the nursing mother, until the arrival of the fifth infant. Relatives flood the house, some helping, others draining the depleted energies and resources of the ideologically-driven couple. The father gradually loses his zeal for fatherhood, but the mother insists on the fulfillments of motherhood with her last bit of strength.

Finally, this utopia of fertility comes to an end with the birth of the fifth child, a biological mistake, retarded mentally but advanced physically. The monstrous offspring is referred to by both parents, partly realistically, partly mythically, as a throwback to some early species of cavemen. As the physical prodigy grows older, the father is ready to give up, but the mother, true to her rigid principles of motherhood, continues to pretend the fifth child is part of the normal household. Finally, the intended and extended family falls apart.

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The other children cannot tolerate the alien creature; the relatives mostly stay away; the father spends nights in the city. A solution—the usual one—is found: the fifth child is sent off to an institution. But the mother, unable to bear its brutality, brings him home again, only to see him later, in adolescence, join a youth gang and leave the home of his mother's fantasies forever. The dream is shattered. And the novella ends with dark implications of decay and dispersion.

It is difficult to know what was Doris Lessing's intention, and, as we are aware, intention is not the same as meaning. But there would seem to be some symbolic reference in the story to the modern situation, at least in England. One easily can read a pessimistic, if not a tragic, sense of life in this story of a couple presumably trying to resist the political tide that for a time seemed to sweep away the traditional—and some of the questionable—values of the past. To Miss Lessing's credit, it must be said that the narrative has a faint touch of satire, but it is tempered by a sympathy for the characters caught in the crossfire of conflicting forces. Nor does she take sides, as she keeps her authorial distance. The advanced English family talk—a kind of nineteenth-century modern—tells the story sparely and almost ironically:

> "You aren't really going to have four more children? enquired Sarah. . . .
>
> "Yes, we are," said David.
>
> "Yes we certainly are," said Harriet. "This is what everyone wants, really, but we've been brainwashed out of it. People want to live like this, really."
>
> "Happy families," said Molly critically: she was standing up for a life where domesticity was kept in its place, a background to what was important.
>
> "We are the centre of this family," said David.
>
> "We are—Harriet and me. Not you, Mother."
>
> "God forbid," said Molly. . . .
>
> "Oh all right," said her son. "It's never been your style."
>
> "It's certainly never been mine," said James, "and I'm not going to apologize for it."
>
> "But you've been a marvelous father, super," chirruped Deborah. "And Jessica's been a super mum. . . . "
>
> "I don't seem to remember your ever giving Molly much of a chance," said Frederick.
>
> "But it's so co-o-o-ld in England," moaned Deborah.

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The Immortal Bartfuss by Aharon Appelfeld takes place at the other end of the human spectrum—in the post-Holocaust world that barely conceals its self-questioning, far from the smug and self-reassuring chatter of English suburbia. Appelfeld's fiction, like Lessing's, is also spare, and resonant with meanings and references that lie behind the text. In fact the unbearable weight of the Holocaust hangs over this short novel about survivors in Israel who cannot recover their lives. Bartfuss, the main character, is immortal because he survived. He lives with another survivor and their two daughters in an empty, paranoid, quarrelsome household.

In Italy, after the Liberation, Bartfuss, and many of the other people in the novel, lived on the margins of society, engaged in illegal trades and transactions. In Israel, they have no human relation to their new country or its inhabitants. For Bartfuss, even sex is anxiously meaningless, as he falls into chance encounters with women who also are drifting through the cracks of society. His accidental meetings with men, too, are fraught with unarticulated memories of the experience that dehumanized them. There are moments when Bartfuss seems to recapture his feelings in relation to his mentally retarded daughter. But they fade into the grayness of Bartfuss's life as he wanders from one gratuitous meeting to another. Indeed, in the unconnected nature of his associations and his conversations with the survivors he meets on the street or in cafés, Bartfuss seems to be a reincarnation of Camus's Meursault or Gide's Lafcadio and Edouard, though unlike Gide and Camus, Appelfeld has his anti-hero formed in the cauldron of the Holocaust—which makes his acts not totally gratuitous.

It is impossible to summarize the narrative, for, in a sense, there is no narrative. Bartfuss drifts every morning from his house where, while he is away, his wife, his two daughters, and his son-in-law search for his secret money hidden in the cellar. He stops for coffee in a few cafés, talks to some vagrant women, wanders over to the sea where his mind sinks into its immense turbulence, goes back to a café, bumps into an old surviving crony who also worked some racket in Italy. He stops some women, all survivors from Italy, who do not remember him. Limply he trudges home, wraps himself in a blanket and falls into a death-like sleep.

Behind the mood of the novel is the memory of the Holocaust, though it is not clear—as it should not be in a work of fiction—how widespread Appelfeld feels the effect of the Holocaust is on the lives of the survivors. Obviously, however, the Holocaust has been in-

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flated symbolically to create the fictional mood. Textually, the experience of the Holocaust has been woven into the novel by incorporating a kind of spatial inarticulateness into the accents of mundane conversation and daily activity. This is not an easy task, and probably only a writer with Appelfeld's command of tone and language could have carried it off. Except for a few lapses, probably in the translation, the writing has a flawless simplicity.

Here is a sample of the taut, spaced-out conversation—reminiscent of Godot:

> "Schmugler," Bartfuss called out loud. "You haven't changed." Something of the old, lost liberty came back to him.
> "Why change?"
> "I don't know." Bartfuss was embarrassed.
> "I, at any rate, haven't found any good reasons to change."
>
> . . . .
>
> "I wanted to see you," said Bartfuss. "So few are left, and even the few, how can I say?"
> "What?" Schmugler twisted his lips.
> "What about you? . . . " he asked Schmugler.
> "I," he answered quietly, "have stopped talking about myself."
> "I remember that you used to tell a lot about your sister," about your sister the pianist."
> "I?" Schmugler's face narrowed.
> Bartfuss said, "Now I find myself remembering a lot."
> "Not I."
> "Why not? Are you under orders?"
> "There's no need for orders."

If the term *postmodern* is to have any meaning, I think it can be applied to both of these novels. Neither is experimental nor technically modernist. Nor do they belong, strictly speaking, to the modernist tradition of large thematic structures or transformations of the medium into the subject. But like many fictional works, mostly from abroad, though also found here in writers like Bellow and Roth, these books by Lessing and Appelfeld present fiction that both simplifies and transcends the narrative itself. Thus they are to be distinguished from novels that rotate around themselves and are essentially self-indulgent, psychologically and literarily—the kind of writing Czeslaw Milosz calls the fiction of erotic complications. Even if *The Fifth Child* and *The Immortal Bartfuss* might not be described as

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truly postmodern (a term that, incidentally, has been debated endlessly), they might be setting a course for new fiction.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS

THE END OF IDEOLOGY

UTOPIA IN POWER: THE HISTORY OF THE SOVIET UNION FROM 1917 TO THE PRESENT. By Mikhail Heller and Aleksandr Nekrich. Summit Books. $24.95.

It is difficult to imagine two historians better qualified or equipped to write a history of the Soviet Union than Mikhail Heller and Aleksandr Nekrich. Born and educated in the Soviet Union, they belong to a generation that survived collectivization, forced industrialization and the purges, fought in the Second World War, witnessed the decay of Stalin's dictatorship, and participated in the struggles of the post-Stalin period. As professional historians they had access to Soviet archives—an extreme privilege accorded only to a tiny group of Soviet scholars affiliated with reputable institutions. Perhaps even more important proved to be the historical knowledge they obtained by talking to their elder friends and colleagues, and other direct participants in the earlier historical events.

Nekrich's name became famous in 1965, when he published his book *June 22, 1941* and demolished the myth of Stalin as a military genius, stressing instead Stalin's personal responsibility for the Soviet unpreparedness for war. Later, during Brezhnev's re-Stalinization the book was banned and destroyed, together with its author's professional career. Nekrich became a virtual nonperson, but still managed to collect important materials on the fate of Soviet "deported nationalities" accused by the Stalinist leadership of collective treason.

Heller, meanwhile, spent the 1960s in Poland, whose love-hate atmosphere *vis-à-vis* Russia and yet vibrant interest in Russian literature helped him grow into a leading specialist in the history of Soviet culture. Eventually, both authors emigrated or were forced to emigrate to the West.

In writing *Utopia in Power: The History of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the Present*, Heller and Nekrich draw on an extremely wide

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range of documents as well as other, more elusive sources. They know all too well that statistics often lie, so they do not limit themselves to these. They draw widely on contemporary Soviet fiction, diaries, and little-known testimonies. Hence, by combining detached analytical scholarship with the immediacy of direct witnesses, Heller and Nekrich's book succeeds in conveying the social atmosphere of Stalinist Russia in a more real and psychologically significant fashion than the most detailed factual account.

Heller and Nekrich obviously belong to the very influential "totalitarianism" school of interpretation of Soviet history, and the title of the book, *Utopia in Power,* gives us a clue to the methodology its authors choose.The book is "party-centered" in the sense that the party appears as omnipotent and omnipresent—the true demiurge of Soviet society. Heller and Nekrich refute the popular idea that Russian history and the Russian national character are mainly responsible for the most salient characteristics of Soviet society. The transformation of pre-October Russia, which was "a country comparable in all respects to the other countries of Europe," into the U.S.S.R. was, they tell us, a sharp break in, rather than a continuation of, Russian history—a conclusion lent considerable support by a comparison of the histories of, say, West and East Germanies, or South and North Koreas.

The treatment of the Stalinist period is the most successful and rewarding part of the book. When Heller and Nekrich published the Russian-language edition of *Utopia in Power,* their treatment of the Stalinist terror and the falsification of statistics was seen as controversial, for the book clashed with a newly-emerging school of "revisionist" Soviet history, whose practitioners try to demonstrate that the Stalinist terror was simply a means to discipline local administrations and that its scale has been greatly exaggerated by its survivors and by Western scholars. But even the first data on terror and the falsification of statistics that has appeared in the Soviet Union during the *glasnost* period show that Heller and Nekrich have been very careful, even conservative, in their estimates of the extent of terror and the Big Lie. Their treatment of the Nazi-Soviet pact, the Second World War, and the final stages of Stalin's rule is especially original, full of new insights and fresh interpretations. *Utopia in Power* is the best history of Stalinism we have.

The history of the post-Stalin era, particularly the Brezhnev decades, is covered less satisfactorily, and interpretation of that

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period is somewhat wanting. There are some objective reasons for this. Admittedly, the Brezhnev period is too recent to permit the necessary historical distance, and the theory of Soviet-type societies is one of the least developed fields in the social sciences. The main problem, however, is the authors' constant reliance on the totalitarian paradigm, which works so well in explaining Stalinism but proves ill-suited to the latest stage of Soviet history. Heller's and Nekrich's concentration on the party's domination of society leads to the false impression that in Soviet society proclaiming a specific policy and achieving the desired results are the same. Sometimes Heller and Nekrich rely so heavily on official Soviet declarations that they unwittingly fall victim to Soviet propaganda. Thus, at the end of the 1970s, one of the grayest *apparatchiks* and ideological chiefs, Ponomarev, proclaimed that the capitalist world had become a besieged fortress, crumbling under the united pressure of socialist and "progressive" third world countries. Heller and Nekrich accept his words at face value and base some questionable far-reaching conclusions on such declarations. But the boasts and the wishful thinking of Soviet leaders documented so well in *Utopia in Power* are only part of the story.

Heller and Nekrich devote much space to explaining Soviet internal stability. They especially stress the role of ideology and that of East-West trade, but here their treatment is so controversial that it weakens the overall soundness of their argument. "The foundation of the totalitarian system is ideology," Heller and Nekrich assert; being "a technique for conditioning human consciousness and spirit and for transforming man into Soviet man," ideology is vital for maintaining internal stability. But as careful observers of Soviet society, the authors cannot fail to notice the obvious erosion of Soviet ideology, which by now has lost so much credibility that belief in it is no longer required of even Soviet citizens. And yet internal stability does not suffer, according to Heller and Nekrich, because the ideological apparatus has succeeded in creating rituals which "arouse in their participants the emotions and reflexes essential to the party at any given moment." When the authors assert that "participation in the ritual alone is adequate for the ideology to penetrate the brain and the blood," it sounds more like a self-congratulatory pronouncement by the Soviet internal propaganda organs than a realistic observation of Soviet everyday life.

In dealing with East-West relations, especially commercial

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ones, Heller and Nekrich become almost obsessed with the image of Western capitalism "selling the rope" to the Soviets. "The capitalist world has continued to bind itself to the socialist one by innumerable economic links," the authors postulate, and, correspondingly, the West is now so interested in the solvency of the Soviet bloc that "the interests of 'real socialism' become those of the West." In this way, the West "becomes a pillar of internal stability of the socialist world," conclude Heller and Nekrich. However, the authors fail to provide any statistics on East-West trade, probably because the share of exports to the Soviet bloc—some two percent of the total volume of Western trade—might be embarrassing to their argument. Their credo that the West supports the stability of the Soviet regime by selling grain and machinery and buying oil, gas and gold may be easily reversed. Ironically, some Soviet economists now reproach Brezhnev's administration for squandering windfall profits from foreign trade when the terms were very favorable to U.S.S.R., and argue that excessive reliance on Western imports delayed necessary economic reforms and weakened the Soviet state.

Gorbachev's attempts to reform the U.S.S.R. are too recent to be analyzed in *Utopia in Power.* But Heller and Nekrich do not believe that the Soviet system can reform itself. They expect no more than tactical maneuvering from any Soviet leadership, designed to gain time before another expansionist attack. The totalitarian paradigm does not allow for change: the authors share the conviction of Hannah Arendt and other students of totalitarianism that it may undergo temporary relaxation and execute tactical retreats but, unable to abandon the pursuit of total control and domination, it remains immune to radical transformation.

Whatever criticisms may be levelled against *Utopia in Power,* Heller and Nekrich should be congratulated for this immensely stimulating book. It is absolutely essential reading for anybody seriously interested in Soviet history and, indeed, contemporary history in general. Sadly, Soviet readers who most need *Utopia in Power* have no access to it. *Glasnost* or not, Soviet authorities keep confiscating copies of *Utopia in Power,* all editions in all languages, whether brought into the Soviet Union by tourists or sent by mail. This book would discredit the army of professional liars, and for this reason alone the party apparatus strongly opposes its publication. It may appear that *perestroika* has finally reached Soviet historiography. For example, editors of major history journals have been replaced,

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and history exams in the secondary schools have been cancelled altogether until textbooks can be rewritten. In praising this decision, *Izvestia* wrote that history classes had "deluded generation after generation poisoning their minds and souls with lies." But Gorbachev immediately proposed that a special commission of the Central Committee should prepare a new Party history. This may well extend but will not remove the limits of officially sanctioned truth. The continuous suppression of independent historical research, such as *Utopia in Power*, means that Soviet historians are constrained to repeat the old lies or, at best, to reinvent the wheel.

VICTOR ZASLAVSY

MISSED CONNECTIONS

BREAK IT DOWN. By Lydia Davis. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $14.95.
THE PROGRESS OF LOVE. By Alice Munro. Alfred A. Knopf. $16.95.
CELEBRATION. By Mary Lee Settle. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $17.95.

The craft of fiction is honed within an inch of its life in Lydia Davis's *Break It Down*. These thirty-four austere, concentrated prose pieces—some of which are stories with something like an event, some of which are sketches engraved on a surface as tender as flesh—are at once disorienting and transfixing, much the same effect life seems to have on the characters in them.

In this title piece, a man whose love affair has broken up tries to rationalize the financial and emotional cost by breaking down the expenses of his only extended escapade with his lover in an undescribed hotel. He computes the cost of the airfare and the hotel and meals first, against the number of times they made love per day on the average, and then begins to qualify this simple equation by the number of hours they took to make love. He then insists to himself that "it's not really one hundred dollars a shot because it goes on all day," "it" being the state of ongoing physical craving for his lover which, he realizes in the next paragraph, after having reached a figure of six dollars an hour, goes on even while sleeping, in fact, even after they have parted, even after the pictures in memory have begun to fade, even after there are only a few "dry little questions"

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about her habits and idiosyncracies that recur from time to time. When all of these moments are counted, he figures that three dollars an hour is a plausible figure, even counting the bad times, of which there was only one: when he told her he loved her and felt he coerced her reciprocal reply. At the end of this meditative calculation he is left wondering why, since the pain is foreknown and lasts longer then the pleasure, one doesn't say that one won't do that again: he has put one thousand dollars into it and come out with an old shirt, her parting gift to him.

The narrator's reluctance to reach a conclusion in spite of his meticulous calculations bespeaks a confusion of values, of how to measure various things in relation to each other. His desire to find some kind of equivalence between money expended and emotional experience is perverse, if common. Syntactically, the same desire to delay conclusion is expressed by the absence of those signs of commencement and closure that we take so much for granted in writing and imagine in speech: the capital and the period. A very, very long "sentence" finally ends:

> . . . you hold back and touch the edges of everything, you edge around until you have to plunge in and finish it off, and when you're finished, you're too weak to stand but after a while you have to go to the bathroom and you stand, your legs are trembling, you hold onto the door frames, there's a little light coming in through the window, you can see your way in and out, but you can't really see the bed.

The attempt here to avoid a rupture in the flow of thought that might be caused by the punctuational and typographical signs of a new sentence is itself a sign of distrust or defiance of formal closure; it is echoed mimetically by the difficulty of seeing the bed, of attaining one's object. Rather than being frustrating, however, the narrator's myopia or delirium is understood as part of the nature of things, against which one cannot argue. And things as they are are bound to be unsatisfactory.

This almost willing acquiescence to the same vaguely hostile order defined by someone else also appears in Davis's stories as sexual malaise. In "The Letter," a woman analyzes a poem sent to her by her exhusband, hoping to find in it some assurance of a possible reconciliation. She finds only the smell of the ink on the paper.

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Again in "A Few Things Wrong with Me," a woman, puzzled by the loss of her lover's affection, feels that the things he doesn't like are probably things she doesn't like about herself either, but which she can't change, such as not being talkative and using index cards to make diet plans and plot summaries. She is left obsessed with "a useless question" that may not even have a "right answer." The characters in these stories not only fail to connect with each other, but also with themselves as anything other than sources of annoyance or frustration. In "Sketches for a Life of Wassilly," the protagonist is described as:

> Not a man of habit, though he wished to be, tried to cultivate habits, was overjoyed when he found something that truly, for a time, seemed necessary to him and that had possibilities of becoming a habit.

The loss of instinct or convention, which might order life so that moments of spontaneous pleasure were possible, blights all of the lives represented in these stories. The deliberate cultivation of this uniformity of tone, the search for *le mot juste* without any sense of *le grand plan* makes the mundane seem menacing, as in "French Lesson I," an ingenious monologue which, while introducing a beginner's vocabulary centered around the daily activities of the farm, suggests that some act of unwonted violence has left the "feathers stuck in *le sang* on the chopping block outside the back door, smaller feathers, however, than would be expected from *un poulet*." These and other questions, perhaps "useless," may be answered in the next lesson, or they may not.

When observation of the minutia of existence has been perfected to the degree Davis achieves in "Cockroaches in Autumn"—twenty sketches, some no more than a sentence: "They nest in the coffee filters, in the woven wicker shelves, and in the crack at the top of a door, where by flashlight you see the forest of moving legs"—one is witnessing the extreme development of some idea about writing, some program adhered to by one perhaps fearful of the consequences of a slight error. Davis's excellent work as a translator of Maurice Blanchôt seems to have made her as distrustful of language as he is, and her knowledge of his literary tradition has been distilled to curious effect. It is as if the most sophisticated French writers of

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the past century or so had finally been taken at their word and, ironically, had become naive.

Henry James once complained about Hawthorne's journals that in them "his mixture of subtlety and simplicity, his interfusion of genius with what I have ventured to call the provincial quality, is most apparent." James had reasoned that Hawthorne may have been reduced to observing the New England quotidian and American nature so carefully because there was "no Epsom nor Ascot"—among other things—in the New World. Perhaps it was, however, more a matter of temperament than circumstance that drove Hawthorne to record as he did. Confronted with the British Museum, he wrote: "It quite crushes a person to see so much at once, and I wandered from hall to hall with a weary and heavy heart, wishing (Heaven forgive me!) that the Elgin marbles and the frieze of the Parthenon were all burnt into lime, and that the granite Egyptian statues were hewn and squared into building stones." Iconoclasm and minimalism seem to yearn for the same reduction of all variation to sameness and all history to dust. Of course, Hawthorne did not just keep journals, and perhaps Davis will also make a chance discovery in the Custom House that frees her considerable talent from regulating the merely mundane.

If one gets the sense at times that Davis's concentration on style produces the same distortion, the same neglect of proportion that one sees in postmodern architecture, whose parts may be exquisite but do not harmonize, the stories in Alice Munro's *The Progress of Love* reveal a crafter perfectly at home within her medium. Set for the most part in the rural Ontario the author has made her particular fictional landscape in previous collections, these are stories in which the normal and the bizarre go so hand in hand that their consanguinity is as obvious as that of identical twins. The more normal people attempt again and again to take care of and take responsibility for those who are afflicted in various ways, only to find themselves inadequate to the task.

In "Monsieur les Deux Chapeaux," Colin has a job as a schoolteacher, a wife and a child, while his brother Ross seems to be a kind of village idiot who wears two hats one day while working as a handyman for the school and is putting an engine that is too big for it in his car. Hesitating to warn Ross of the risk, Colin extracts a promise from his wife, Glenna, who has "a way . . . of dealing with things without talking or thinking about them" and who isn't thrown

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"into doubts and agonies" by problems, that she will not ride in Ross's car. Interpolated into this narrative is the story of a childhood incident that defined Colin's relationship with his brother. Fearing that if Ross gets hold of a rifle they and some other boys have found in a car, "loaded or not, it would explode," Colin grabs the gun and it goes off. Ross screams, falls to the ground, and Colin bolts. Ross is not dead, however: only stunned or shamming. Finally Colin is persuaded to come down from the bridge where he has fled, when the police turn the lights on Ross to show he is alive. While he sat there, however, Colin thought, "What was silly was to think in these chunks of words. Colin. Shot. Ross. To see it as an action, something sharp and separate, an event, a *difference*." Then when he finds he has been spared that difference this time, he and the story conclude: "He knew that to watch out for something like that happening—to Ross, and to himself—was going to be his job in life from then on." The story from the past is told, presumably, to explain the protective stance that Colin feels he should take toward Ross. Yet his own relation to the past seems less clearly consequential. He remarks to Glenna that they should take some pictures of the kitchen floor before they finish renovating "so we can remember what we've done." The narrative structure here seems to be calling for one kind of understanding of the way cause and effect and past and present are related, but the characters seem to miss, if not understanding, at least being able to act on any knowledge of how to prevent disaster, how to learn from the past. Even the sublime Glenna, who "could hold in her mind an orderly succession of rooms, an arrangement that was ordained, harmonious, and by her, completely understood," can do no more than absent herself from the apparently inevitable catastrophe the others have decided Ross is courting.

This sense of missed connections appears in various ways in other stories. In the title story the narrator is puzzled by the incompatability of the tales her aunt and her mother tell, about the time their mother threatened to hang herself, and about the differences between the way her mother recounts burning the money she inherited from her hated father and her own recollection of the event. Yet, going through her old house, she tells the new owner her version of the latter story, in which her father plays a benevolent protective role while her mother does this thing her sister calls crazy. She then deliberately lies to the new owner after he has made a remark about the sexual shenanigans of the commune that once lived in the

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house. She thinks that this lie counts as one of the "moments of kindness and reconciliation [that] are worth having." The different versions of events seem to have no more relative value than the layers of wallpaper she sees in the corner of the room.

In "Eskimo," the strangest of these stories and perhaps the most effective in its use of a shifting point of view—a device used too casually in other stories—the sense of missed connections, of layers rather than sequences, takes a bizarre psychological twist as the heroine attempts to rescue a young Eskimo girl who she thinks is being abducted on an airplane. Herself en route to Tahiti on an involuntary vacation arranged by her boss, the lover with whom she is obsessed, Mary Jo fantasizes about the couple, tries to talk the drunk girl into confiding in her, and then stares in fascination as the Eskimo kisses and licks the man's face "in a trance of devotion." Stricken by desire, "sudden and punishing as a rush of loose earth down a mountainside," and then plunged into a nightmare in which her efforts to help the girl are thwarted by the logic of dreams, Mary Jo awakens to the "duet of eloquent, innocent snores" and the story concludes with simple irony: "This is the beginning of her holiday." The passions that drive the characters in this story may be thwarted, but obsession is refreshing after the lukewarm inconsequence of some of the other stories in this collection, particularly "The Moon in the Orange Street Skating Rink" and "Fits."

The one memorable moment of humor in the collection is in the longest story, "A Queer Streak." The heroine, Violet, sacrifices what promises to be a normal, fulfilling life as a minister's wife when she confesses to her fiancé that her sister had terrorized their parents by leaving threatening notes around their farm. The odd sister goes on to live a normal life, but Violet actually becomes interesting and transcends the morose literalness of small-town living one night when she leaves a pudding outside to cool and returns to find that the snow has buried it. She goes "tramping around in the snowy yard after dark, calling, 'Pudding, pudding, here pudding!' as if it were a dog . . . elaborating the performance, stopping to whistle." One wishes there were more moments like this and fewer efforts at poignancy, particularly at the conclusions of the stories. The image of a "lily floating on the cloudy river water, perfect and familiar" that ends "Circle of Prayer" seems stale, rather than radiant, as intended.

While Munro's stories chronicle the attempt to escape from eccentricity or boredom without abandoning responsibility to middle-

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class respectability, Mary Lee Settle's latest novel, *Celebration,* is comic in its effort to affirm the universal value of life. Although the main part of the novel is set in London in the swinging sixties, the excursions via narrative or one or the other character's impossibly long monologues to decadent Hong Kong, mysterious Kurdistan, and darkest Africa turn this picaresque into a centrifugal, rapidly disintegrating exploration of the variety and wonders of experience. The melodramatic wedding and funeral celebrations that conclude the novel seem in questionable taste in a novel that ostensibly questions ethnocentricity. The black man is sacrificed; the white people wed. When the Scottish geologist hero recalls the sound of African "herbivores" grazing, we might think that this is merely an instance of the kind of anthropocentrism that could give humanism a bad name, but when he refers to the "wrinkled dugs" of a black woman he has murdered, one wonders why Settle has chosen to degrade the hero and those breasts. If the excesses of local color that cram *Celebration* were all one could hope for in a big novel, minimalism would seem more attractive.

BEVERLY HAVILAND

SEX AND SOCIETY

CROSSINGS. By Marie Josephine Diamond. Hermes House. $6.00.
CHRISTINE/ANNETTE. By Albert Guerard. E. P. Dutton. $17.95.
THE OBJECT OF MY AFFECTION. By Stephen McCauley. Simon and Schuster. $17.95.

Contemporary fiction that it is emotionally flat, cool, eviscerated, even when it is reviled rather than admired, seems to dominate critical discourse, diverting positive attention from the wide range of current works marked by emotional depth and vigor. The novels of substantial emotion discussed here differ enormously under various formal fictional subheadings (setting, subject matter, literary lineage, point of view, voice, tone, style, structure). But they have a common ambition for fiction: that its varied, powerful resources be put to the service of representing what really matters in life (inevitably betraying a conviction that something *does* really mat-

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ter). For all three, what really matters has to do with the social situation, in late twentieth-century culture, of sexual love.

Albert Guerard's superb *Christine/Annette,* his seventh novel, is moved by the desire at the heart of the Freudian sexual mythos: the "Oeidpal" desire of the son for the mother. Guerard, author of books on Hardy, Conrad, Gide, and, in *The Triumph of the Novel,* Dickens, Dostoevsky and Faulkner, writes in the great tradition of international modernism, with its artful complexity and self-reflexivity, its preoccupations with time, consciousness, and the psyche, and its double focus on subjectivity and society. Guerard has a broad command of modern European history rare now in America outside academic history departments—certainly rare in serious contemporary fiction. *Christine/Annette* is not a "researched" historical novel, however; rather it is written out of a remarkable breadth of what used to be called "general knowledge" (now it is called "cultural literacy").

The novel's doubly double protagonist(s) are a woman who has two chronologically disjunct incarnations, and her son, who is double of both. The story is narrated primarily from the son's point of view, and is primarily the story of his search for the mother. He loses her (and she him, also an important fictional thread) at the only slightly post-Oedipal age of seven. Recovering her, and his idyllic, lost pre-Oedipal childhood, becomes his permanent obsession. In a sense, this is a Freudian story of the fatedness or invevitability of the Family Romance: of adult lives spent in an effort to reconstitute the family configuration of early childhood no matter how appalling it was. The father/husband of this novel, as villain of the Oedipal plot, is appalling indeed: a shady Houston capitalist, a sort of squalidly belated robber baron, who "saves" the teenaged, French Christine from German patriotic fervor in Berlin at the outbreak of the Great War by, in effect, buying her—a patriarchal paradigm.

But this is a Freudian family romance with a big difference: it is just as much the mother's story as it is the son's. The mother, in fact, is the title character, and the novel is dominated thematically and morally by its investigation of her socially constrained, sexually distorted feminine life. Moreover, as (doubled) doubles, mother and son are an exploration of the gender-egalitarian aspect of Jungian animus/anima androgyny.

Guerard employs various fictional modes to generate the rich, complex texture of this novel. A large chunk of it, in fact, is written

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in the form of a screenplay: early cinema is a central metaphor of the novel—a metaphor of naive but powerful transformation of life into art—as well as a central locus of narrative. Narration is the work of several characters, from widely diverse points of view, across cultures (French, German and American), and through the whole length of twentieth-century history. The story is beautifully embedded in, and consonant with, Guerard's moral vision of that history. Evocations of time and place—Berlin on the eve of the Great War, Houston in the teens and twenties, postwar Paris, mid-century Mexico—are in themselves intensely pleasurable, and the characters seem to come to life at discovering themselves to be the point of such vivid evocations. One particularly recalls son Charles's comic-erotic sexual coming of age in the Parisian twenties, and mother Christine/Annette's search for Charles's father, her former husband (a futile effort to ascertain whether he is really dead at last) through a surrealistically imagined Mexican hinterland, into the "village of the blind." These parallel searches for lost time are not allowed any Proustian fruition; in fact, Guerard uses fiction's formal resourcefulness to debunk, here in the late twentieth century, that utopian modernist credo of the redemptive power of art.

The Object of My Affection, Steven McCauley's first novel, is warm, full of love, and a delight to read. Like Guerard, McCauley manages to avoid sentiment and easy pathos while delivering the full emotional impact of desire. *The Object of My Affection* is written in the great American Huck Finn-Holden Caulfield tradition of comic, self-deprecating first-person narration that works by showing a great deal more than its innocence tells. This is a well-made novel, charming us with a wit that develops at the same time the protagonist's problematic self-effacement, and entertaining us with a group of fully realized New York settings: the Upper West Side of Columbia graduate students, "brownstone Brooklyn" at the intersection of new gentry and old ethnic working class, a yuppy East Side private school, artsy SoHo, and those New York outposts, post-hippie rural Vermont and the parental suburban house frozen in the fifties childhood of the narrator's late baby-boom generation.

What goes on in these deeply satisfying settings is a story of a significantly but not fully unravelled sex-gender system. The protagonist is a young gay man in the midst of a series of varyingly self-destructive and unsatisfying affairs who becomes involved with a woman. "Affairs" and "involved with" are sufficiently vague to cover

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without distorting the complicated, socially undefined erotic-emotional situations this novel develops. McCauley's central plot element is provided by the woman's unintended but unaborted pregnancy. In trying to construct a family for this baby, McCauley investigates both the constraints and the recently-expanded possibilities of "family"—both its congruence and its disjunction with sexual love. In the freedom from social-sexual stereotypes this novel allows us to imagine, and in the wealth and generosity of its vision of both erotic and nonerotic love, it is a gift to its readers.

At the other end of the emotional spectrum from McCauley (angry, bitter, visionary, despairing) is Marie Josephine Diamond's *Crossings,* another first novel, written in the avant-garde tradition of surrealism and the *nouveau roman.* While the narrative tone of this novel is flat and cool, that tone is a device for heightening the impact of emotion rather than a gauge of its absence.

The unnamed protagonist, always called "she" by the distant third person narrator, embodies female oppression. "She" plays out the futility of her desires for love and freedom in a series of chillingly well realized, Kafkaesque incarcerations and escapes. Diamond employs a combination of minute local particularity and a pervasive context of patriarchal-fascistic tyranny. "She" is imprisoned in jails, hospitals, houses; dominated by husbands, doctors, soldiers, spies—men invested with violent and absolute power over her. Her attempts at self-assertion and gratification of desire are foredoomed just as much by her own ambivalence and self-hatred as by her impotence. Nevertheless, each scene is excruciatingly re-invested with hope, desire and cunning: "she" repeatedly musters all her courage and force of personality to escape, only to find herself imprisoned again precisely where she thought she would be free. This novel impugns by mesmeric delineation the devastated social-sexual-emotional territory that McCauley (partly) redeems.

MARIANNE DeKOVEN

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WHAT THE WOLF MAN SAID

THE WOLF MAN'S MAGIC WORD. By Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. Translated by Nicholas Rand, with a foreword by Jacques Derrida. University of Minnesota Press. $13.95.

Sergei Pankeiev (1886–1979), also known as Freud's "Wolf Man," later was analyzed by Ruth Mack Brunswick. Both case histories together with the Wolf Man's autobiographical remarks and additional editor's notes are available in a volume edited by Muriel Gardiner, *The Wolf Man by the Wolf Man* (1971). After his death, Karin Obholzer published her conversations with him in *The Wolf Man Sixty Years Later* (German version: 1980, English translation: 1982).

In 1976, the Parisian psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok reinterpreted this case from a new perspective in *The Wolf Man's Magic Word.* The translation, a volume in *Theory and History of Literature,* is introduced by the translator, Nicholas Rand, and has an afterword by Maria Torok.

Abraham and Torok's interpretive model, 'Cryptonymy', attracted the attention of Derrida. But not even he noticed a number of mistakes in their interpretation. Some of these facts could have been checked in Gardiner's book and others in Obholzer's.

The joint authors' method is based on retranslating the Wolf Man's famous nightmare into a text, because they assume that the Wolf Man had translated this text into the nightmare. Instead of following Freud in tracing the Wolf Man's trauma to his witnessing or fantasizing the primal scene, they focus their interpretation on the words he must avoid:

> . . . what is at stake here is not a *metonymy of things* but a *metonymy of words*. The contiguity that presides over this procedure is by nature not a representation of things not even a representation of words, but arises from the lexical continguity of the various meanings of the same words, that is, from the *allosemes,* as they are catalogued in a dictionary. For TZARAPINA (scar), to evoke *tieret* (to rub), a form of lexical contiguity has to be inserted."

In their *cryptonymy,* a split Ego is postulated to explain the intrasymbolic relationships of words. A given word must be under-

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stood by the Ego as is, before it is coupled with a synonym with a variant meaning. The hypothesis of a Rift or Tear in the Ego serves to explain the occurence of a word that is understood without being disguised. This word is coupled with another word that is its synonym with a variant meaning. The crypt containing a given word is located in one part of the Ego, while its correlated word is in another one. Moreover, a partition within the Unconscious is assumed to correspond to a Rift in the Ego. Thus the word *tieret,* for instance, becomes fetishized and can cross the partition of the Unconscious only if it has been turned into its variant meaning as a visual image. While the Wolf Man's other words speak in rhymes and reproduce his traumatic dialogue, *tieret* is a silent word "reconstructed from a visual image . . . that is, a masturbatory or sublimated fantasy."

Now, the stages of the Wolf Man's trauma can be understood: the incestuous relationship of his father to his older sister led to his 'seduction' by his sister, and discussing these matters with his English governess led to the quarrel between the governess and his mother. Thereby, the scandal about his father turned pleasure into sin, his father into a criminal, and the little boy became a court of law raised above the father. His nightmare about the wolves sitting on branches of a tree is reinterpreted in the context of the quarrel that he witnessed.

The keystone of Abraham and Torok's interpretation is "the discovery . . . that English had been the Wolf Man's childhood language. Freud had taken seventeen years to realize this and to draw his decisive yet succinct conclusions . . . . [and] English as the cryptic language . . . allowed us to identify the active and hidden words." But the Wolf Man's autobiographical remarks in Gardiner's and Obholzer's books contradict this 'discovery'.

The reference to Freud is to a case in *Fetishism,* concerning a patient, who according to Freud was brought up 'in an English nursery but had later come to Germany, where he forgot his mother-tongue completely." Although the Wolf Man is not mentioned in this case, Abraham and Torok assume that this refers to him for this patient, just like the Wolf Man, complained about a "shine on the nose." They may be right in assuming that Freud did not have two patients with the same complaint, but this does not imply that Freud believed that the Wolf Man was brought up in an English nursery or that he was right in adopting this belief.

After quoting the famous nightmare with the wolves, Abraham

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and Torok continue: "Around the age of four or five . . . when his nurse left in turmoil, our patient must have had at least a basic knowledge of English. This is confirmed in connection with Elizabeth, his subsequent nurse: She would read children's stories to him in English. It was therefore plausible to look for foreign verbal elements in his early dream material."

However, we know that Miss Oven, the English nurse, arrived when the Wolf Man was three-and-a-half years old and left a few months later. According to the evidence available in Gardiner's book, Miss Oven was employed by the Wolf Man's family *only* during the summer of 1890. His subsequent nurse, Miss Elizabeth, was a Bulgarian woman, born in Russia, who read to the Wolf Man and his sister German and English fairy tales in *Russian translation.* By the time Abraham and Torok wrote Chapter Three of their book, both the English and the German editions of Gardiner's book were available to them. Yet they disregarded the Wolf Man's claim that the English fairy tales were read to him in translation. In his conversations with Karin Obholzer, the Wolf Man claimed repeatedly that he did not learn or speak English. Obholzer's book is quoted by Maria Torok in her Afterword, but neither she nor Nicholas Rand defend the fundamental assumption that English is the Wolf Man's childhood language.

Facts also contradict Maria Torok's interpretation in her Afterword, when she discusses Freud's "Dream and Occultism" (1932). According to Freud, if someone would assert that the core of the earth consisted of jam [*Marmelade* in German], then instead of investigating this jam hypothesis, we would ask ourselves "what sort of person this must be who can arrive at such a notion." Then, Torok goes on to:

> . . . the rhyme conjured up by 'marmalade'. Marmolada is the highest mountain in the Dolomites in northeast Italy where Carrara marble is quarried. It is also the place where Michelangelo obtained the marble he used for his statues, for example his *Moses,* to which Freud devoted an entire essay.

But to assume that Carrara marble is quarried in Marmolada and that Michelangelo went there for the marble there for his *Moses* is as serious as the jam hypothesis. Michelangelo used white marble from the mountains in the province of Carrara, and near Pietrasanta. Carrara marble is quarried in Carrara, located in the Apuan Alps

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near the Ligurian Sea and not in the Dolomites.

Interpretations that founder on factual mistakes cannot be corrected. A proposed interpretation of the Wolf Man's words fails, if English was not his childhood language; commonly available facts defeat the suggested interpretation of Freud's text. Such defeats have a pernicious secondary effect: our attention shifts from what is interpreted to the interpreter.

While Abraham and Torok failed in interpreting Freud's or the Wolf Man's words, I believe, their work fails also as literary criticism. We cannot argue that the interpretations proposed are about the words and actions of literary characters, which they have created. For just as psychoanalytic interpretation must hit its target, literary criticism cannot replace the interpretation of a literary character's words and deeds by the creation of another literary character whose words and deeds are interpreted.

Still, even if Abraham and Torok's interpretations must be rejected, an interpretive method paying attention to words, their translation, synonyms, rhymes, deserves a hearing. For interpretations can neither establish nor defeat interpretive methods—which can be validated only in practice: their hypothesis of a Rift in the Ego and a corresponding split in the Unconscious may provide better interpretations and a more useful therapy than the competing practices. Cryptonymy, therefore, deserves to be taken as seriously as its rivals.

LAURENT STERN

THE FAMILY AND ITS CRITICS

DOMESTIC TYRANNY: THE MAKING OF AMERICAN SOCIAL POLICY AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FROM COLONIAL TIMES TO THE PRESENT. By Elizabeth Pleck. Oxford University Press. $24.95.

Elizabeth Pleck's book charts and analyzes the vicissitudes of American social policy on domestic violence. According to Pleck, the underlying cause of violence is the inherently tyrannical structure of the nuclear family. Because the nuclear family is sacrosanct the tyranny is entrenched, and the result is a general indifference to

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family violence and resistance to its social control. To protect the structure of the family in a male-dominated society, argues Pleck, those who resist the threat of social incursion appeal to the "Family Ideal." The crucial elements of the Family Ideal are *1)*belief in domestic privacy; *2)*belief in conjugal and parental rights; and *3)*belief in the need to preserve the family.

The Family Ideal is an ever-present barrier to reform. Only reformers paying tribute to it may successfully breach it. Historically, Pleck observes, this has meant that successful reformers rejecting the Ideal have had to be less than open. "Those who criticize it most directly and vehemently were defeated. . . . The more successful reformers have been politically cricumspect . . . and presented their remedies as a means of preserving the home." By claiming to *restore* the family, moderate nineteenth-century feminists were able to get conservative support for legislation against child abuse or wife-battering. According to Pleck, this kind of subterfuge is the norm, although it takes different forms in different periods. Avoiding direct confrontations with the issue of family tyranny usually has meant presenting family violence as simple criminal behavior. Thus the Puritans buried their laws against wife-beating in their criminal code. Sometimes public policy against domestic violence was supported by wealthy and politically well-connected persons who were above the suspicion of attacking the status quo. This happened when the founders of the SPCC reassured the public that they still were in favor of "good wholesome flogging of children." But when Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony directly attacked the Family Ideal, they failed.

In recent years some successful reforms were initiated by focusing on the battered-child syndrome, and they have been furthered by radical feminism, which has, according to Pleck, "deepened thinking about the nature of male-female relations, marriage and the family." As we know, the new feminist insight affirms that the personal also is political. This perspective informs Pleck's book: she sees the family in political terms. (Unlike "violence," "tyranny" is a political term.) Nevertheless, even with so much current awareness, Pleck observes, confrontational reform that attacks the family itself cannot be successfully carried out. "No social movement survives the process of community acceptance with all its radical ideals intact."

Pleck argues that we urgently need to "legitimize and expand alternatives to the nuclear family." Unfortunately this suggestion, which comes at the very end, is not expanded upon in her book. So

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readers are left hanging; having been told that the Family Ideal supports family tyranny, they are left to look for revolutionary alternatives in other places. I had the odd feeling that Pleck was perhaps deliberate in not spelling out the revolutionary implications of her analysis of family tyranny and violence. Is it unfair to suggest that Pleck herself adopted the careful and ambiguous tactics of the successful reformers who avoid confrontation by wrapping their revolutionary colors in a banner of ameliorative ambiguity? For it is evident to the careful reader that Pleck prefers a society in which the family as we know it has been abolished.

Pleck fails to consider the question of how much domestic violence there might be in alternative arrangements. She seems unimpressed that, historically, alternatives to the family are unpopular, scattered, and tend to be tyrannical. She does not take up the possible intrinsic merit of the Family Ideal or its tenaciousness in human history. In characterizing the Family Ideal, Pleck emphasizes *authority*. This is to overlook entirely the positive aspects of the Ideal. Domestic violence is shocking and tragic, not simply because it violates the criminal law, but because it violates family ideals of nurture and protectiveness. We are inclined to remove children from brutal homes and to place them in alternative family settings, with the hope that those settings will provide the tender regard their own families should have given them.

Pleck discounts worries about the dangers of public incursions into the family by police, social workers, and psychiatrists, and she shows little concern that it is primarily the poor who would be targeted for strictest regulation. Reading Pleck, one gets little sense that there are serious questions about state intrusions into family life. Yet any consideration of domestic violence inevitably leads to serious moral dilemmas about the rights of family versus the state's right to further the welfare of its citizens. Surely the existing limitations are not due merely to an historical conspiracy to preserve a defective status quo.

A closer look at the relation between family violence and the integrity of the family might have given Pleck pause. As the divorce rate shows, the family as a social institution is currently very *weak*. The difficulty in getting a divorce was once considered a prime reason for a high incidence of domestic murder. Why, then, do we find that easy divorce is accompanied by an *increase* in the incidence of marital murder? Consider also how the weakening of the family has adversely affected the potential victims of domestic violence.

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Though some victims may be better off now that divorce is easy to come by, recent studies by social analysts and economists, such as Lenore Weitzman and Sylvia Ann Hewlett, show that in general women and children are seriously threatened by easy divorce. The disintegration of the family appears to have had the effect of exposing children to greater risks outside the natural family. It is now well known that a child's chances of being abused increase if she (girls are at greatest risk) resides with a stepfather, foster father, or a mother's live-in boyfriend. The natural father in the traditional family would appear to be the female child's best bet.

None of these uncomfortable considerations has a place in Pleck's argument or in her version of the social history of domestic violence. Her analysis of the history of reform suffers grievously from her systematic failure to consider possible objections to her critique of the Family Ideal. I confess I find it not a little astonishing that after just a few short years of feminist social theorizing, a purportedly serious book on social policy that blandly assumes the family is essentially tyrannical and that those who support its integrity were benighted or in the thrall of false consciousness could be published. A history of public policy on family violence that simply takes this for granted does not persuade.

CHRISTINA HOFF SOMMERS

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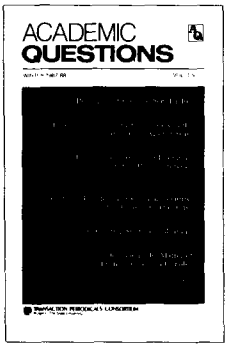

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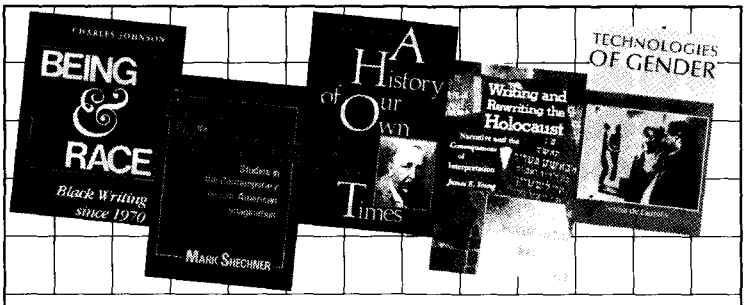

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Brahms in Rio (1988) by Lawrence Poons. Pencil. 214 × 436 cm. Courtesy of André Emmerich Gallery.

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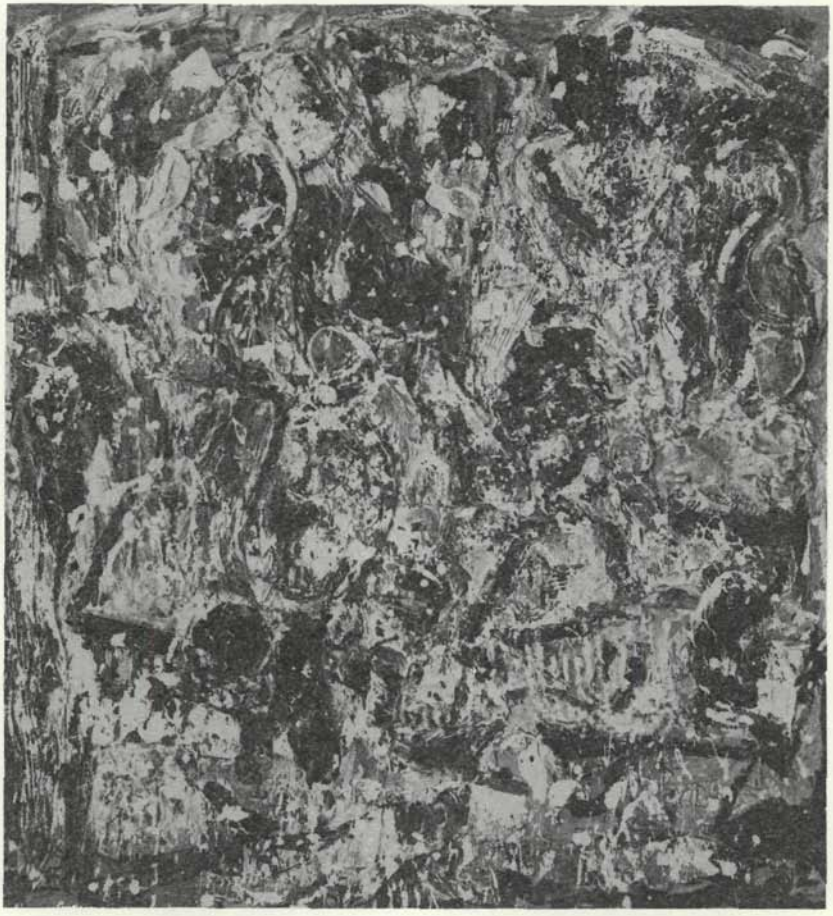

Marengo #2 (1988) by Katja Jacobs. Mixed media on canvas. 152 × 140 cm. Courtesy of Mira Goddard Gallery.

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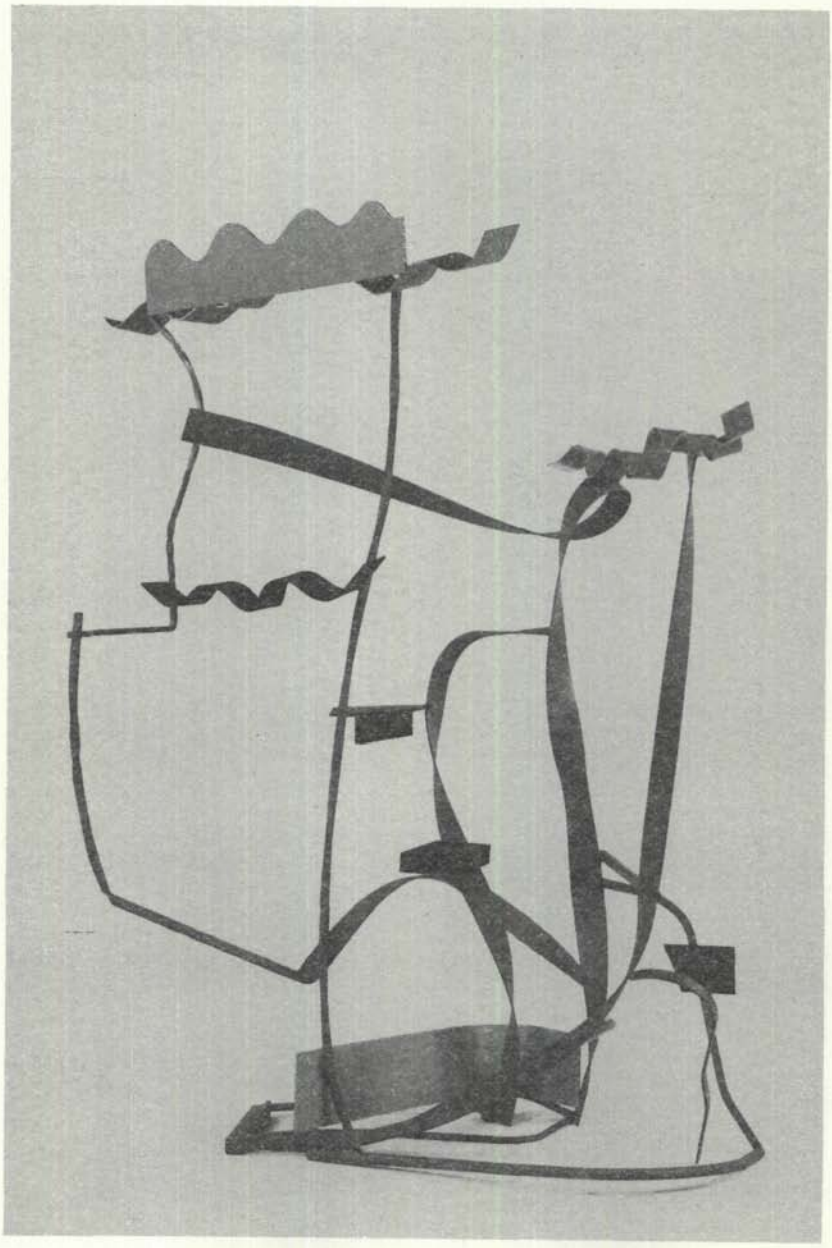

Sea Steps (1988) by James Wolfe. Painted steel. 81" × 57" × 32". Courtesy of André Emmerich Gallery.

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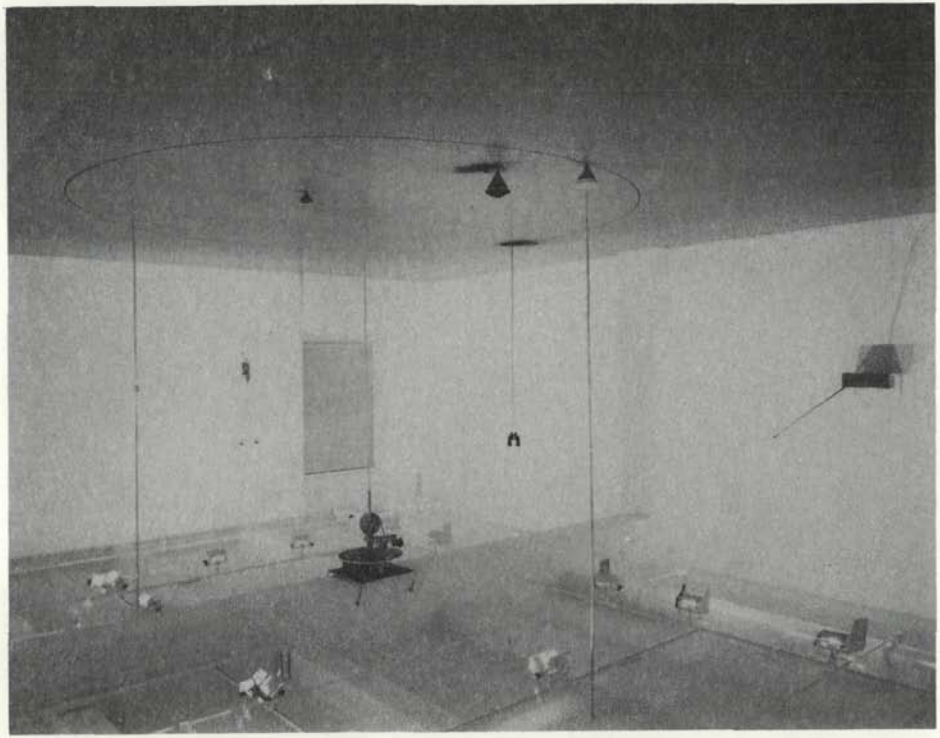

Art Circus (1988) by Rebecca Horn. Machine, glass, pigment, water, mercury, egg, binoculars. 216" × 15'. Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery.

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